the weekly
MARCH 9, 2009 • $4.95
Standard

JOSEPH EPSTEIN ON MALCOLM GLADWELL

OBAMA'S AMERICA

- FRED BARNES
- TOM DONNELLY
- ANDREW FERGUSON
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the weekly Standard

The Weekly Standard (ISSN 1083-3013), a division of News America Incorporated, is published weekly (except the first week in January, third week in April, second week in July, and fourth week in August) at 1150 17th St., NW, Suite 505, Washington D.C. 20036. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, DC, and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to The Weekly Standard, P.O. Box 50108, Boulder, CO 80322-0108. For subscription customer service in the United States, call 1-800-274-7293. For new subscription orders, please call 1-800-283-2014. Subscribers: Please send new subscription orders and changes of address to The Weekly Standard, P.O. Box 50108, Boulder, CO 80322-0108. Please include your latest magazine mailing label. Allow 3 to 5 weeks for arrival of first copy and address changes. Canadian/foreign orders require additional postage and must be paid in full prior to commencement of service. Canadian/foreign subscribers may call 1-850-682-7644 for subscription inquiries. American Express, Visa/MasterCard payments accepted. Cover price, $4.95. Back issues, $4.95 (includes postage and handling). Send letters to the editor to The Weekly Standard, 1150 17th Street, N.W., Suite 505, Washington, DC 20036-4617. For a copy of The Weekly Standard Privacy Policy, visit www.weeklystandard.com or write to Customer Service, The Weekly Standard, 1150 17th St., NW, Suite 505, Washington, D.C. 20036. Copyright 2009, News America Incorporated. All rights reserved. No material in The Weekly Standard may be reprinted without permission of the copyright owner. The Weekly Standard is a registered trademark of News America Incorporated.

BPA INTERNATIONAL

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At Ease . . .

Here you see Barack Obama stepping off the presidential helicopter, with a brisk salute to his Marine guards flanking the stepladder. Elbow out, index finger flattened against the eyebrow, the president's stiff-armed, machine-like salutation should satisfy those journalists, bloggers, and radio personalities who have commented on Obama's adaptation to White House "tradition," or criticized his saluting technique.

The problem, as far as THE SCRAPBOOK is concerned, is that saluting White House military aides is not only not tradition, but arguably improper. A salute is a gesture of recognition between uniformed members of the armed services, a sign of deference or, in the military's hierarchical etiquette, mutual respect. Presidents are, indeed, "commander in chief of the Army and Navy of the United States," as the Constitution tells us; but presidents are also civilians, and soldiers

and civilians don't exchange salutes. A president is free to acknowledge his military guardians in any way he sees fit—smile, nod, word of thanks, wave—but saluting is probably the one thing he shouldn't do.

All right, all right, this is one of those arcane rules that drives reasonable people to subversion. But it's worth pointing out that, far from being a presidential tradition, the practice of saluting Marine guards at the White House dates all the way back to—Ronald Reagan, whose "salute" was closer to a Midwestern hail than anything known in the military. You can search through the archives for photographs or newsreels of presidents before 1981 greeting men (and women) in uniform, and the closest thing you'll find to a salute is a hearty handshake or friendly nod. Dwight D. Eisenhower, a West Point graduate and five-star general, never saluted anybody as president because he knew that, as a matter of civic symbolism, soldiers saluted him, not the other way around.

So if Barack Obama chooses some alternative gesture—or no gesture at all—it's fine with THE SCRAPBOOK. There are more important things to worry about in the Obama presidency. ♦

Hard Times

Evidence of hard times keeps rolling in. And THE SCRAPBOOK has appointed itself chronicler of the worst recession—we prefer to call it a depression—since the Carter administration.

Here's one shocking example: In Paris last week, artifacts from the estate of fashion designer Yves St. Laurent went on the block at Christie's, and after several rounds of half-hearted bidding, the final total was a disappointing $484.6 million. We repeat: $484.6 million! A lousy half-billion dollars for an estate sale is just one measure of how sick the global economy has become.

Take, for instance, this "dragon" chair, by designer Eileen Gray, which was part of the lot. Since Yves St. Laurent may actually have sat in it—perhaps even thrown his coat over the arms, or leaned his shoulders against the pillow while watching TV—the chair, in THE SCRAPBOOK's estimation, should have gone for somewhere between three-quarters of a billion dollars and a cool trillion. But when the auction was over the St. Laurent estate had to settle for a paltry $28.3 million, paid by New York nightclub owner/decorative arts collector Steven Greenberg.

Sure, it was the highest price ever paid at auction for a 20th-century piece of furniture, but are you still in denial about the economic tailspin? When a chair once sat in by Yves St. Laurent can be scooped up for anything less than $250 million—indeed, for an insulting $28.3 million!—you have to wonder about the state of our culture's values. At the very least, we expect Mr. Greenberg to let THE SCRAPBOOK sit in the chair when we visit his rooftop lounge on Fifth Avenue. ♦

OBAMA, NEWSCOM; CHAIR, CHRISTIE'S IMAGES LTD. 2009

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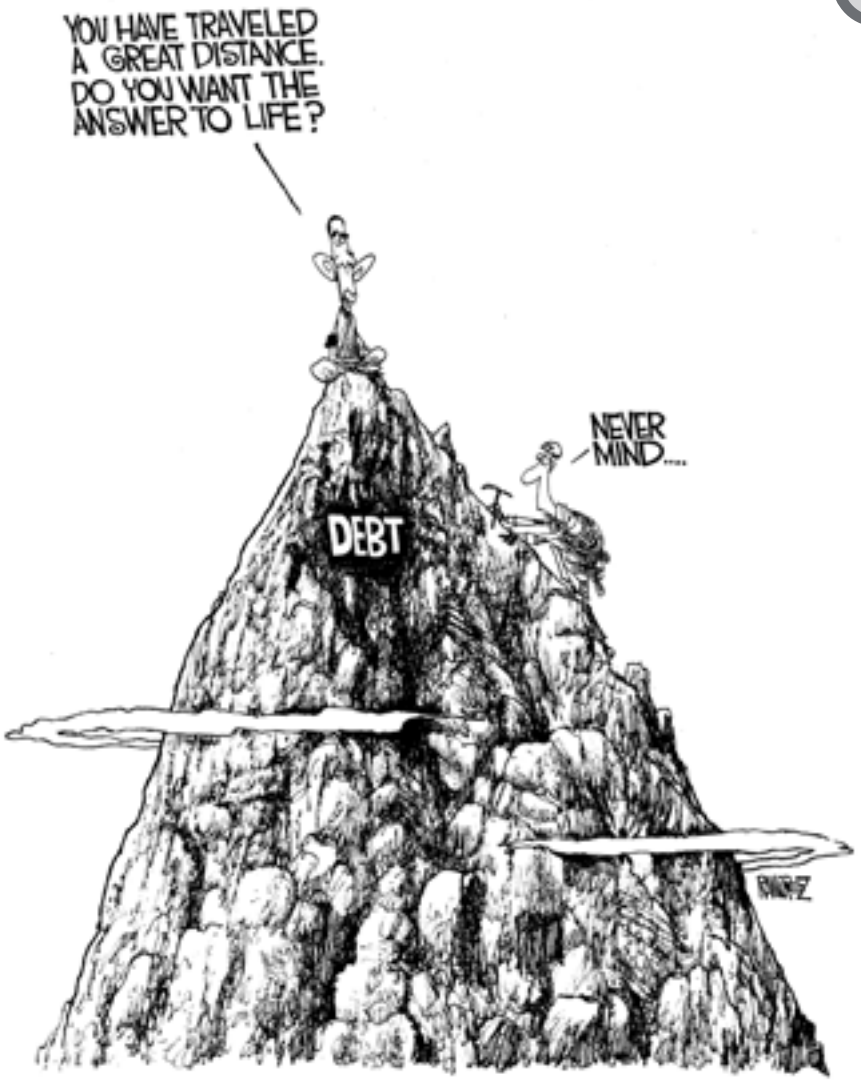

The 'New York Times' Gets Fooled Again

On January 27, the *New York Times* ran a profile of a Manhattan support group for bankers' girlfriends. The group, called "Dating a Banker Anonymous" (DABA), was helping beautiful young socialites cope with the financial crisis and its attendant horrors. For instance, the *Times* reported that on the group's blog, a woman who was dating a married man complained that the two of them weren't traveling together anymore. He responded that money had become so tight that his wife was keeping tabs on his spending.

The entire premise seemed too good to be true. Two days after the story ran, Linda Holmes, a blogger for NPR, cast doubt on the story by examining the DABA website. Everything about the production reeked of premeditated self-promotion, including a 3,300 word terms-of-usage legal disclaimer. *Newsweek* began poking around and, well, it didn't take much poking: The DABA girls themselves gleefully confessed that the entire project—the support group, the stories, the "other women" on the blog—was all just a goof. Or, as one of the two perpetrators of the satire happily told *Newsweek*, it's "rooted in emotional truth." The good news is, the girls may have succeeded in using the *Times* to secure themselves a book deal.

For its part, the *Times* seems relatively blasé about having been hijacked by a couple of girls on the make and used for their publicity stunt. Instead of retracting the story, the paper simply added an "Editor's Note" saying that had their reporter known the real nature of the DABA project, "the article would have described it accordingly." ♦

Obama Suck-up Watch

'By journalistic convention, this is about the time—a month or so into the new administration—that what is known as the narrative about Obama should take a negative turn. The glow of the election and the inauguration has faded; the Dow keeps falling and unemployment keeps rising. There have even been the usual cabinet appointment stumbles. . . . Given the enormity of the moment and the temperament of the president, however, our argument this week is that the predictable rush toward criticism or acclaim has grown stale and less relevant than it has been in administrations past" (Jon Meacham, *Newsweek*, March 2). ♦

Correction

In an item on this page three weeks ago, recounting how retired general Anthony Zinni had been jerked around by the Obama administration—first promised the post of U.S. ambassador, and then having the offer revoked—The Scrapbook mistakenly described him as a retired Army general. Zinni in fact retired after a storied career in the U.S. Marine Corps. ♦

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Casual

Choosing Hope over Fear

In his inaugural address, Barack Obama told the American people, "We gather because we have chosen hope over fear, unity of purpose over conflict and discord." The same could be said of the Second Annual Tequila and Mezcal Festival currently going on at the Oyamel Cocina Mexicana in Washington, D.C., which unites participants in the hope of conquering the fear of tequila, a beverage whose consumption can lead to conflict and discord.

Kingsley Amis once wrote: "About the commonest causes of death in Mexico are murder and heart disease. . . . Although no figures are available, I can't help thinking that tequila makes a contribution in both departments." Though that's an exaggeration, many of us do have our reasons for avoiding tequila.

Asking friends if any of them ever had a bad experience with the drink, I discovered one commonality: memory loss. As in, "I vaguely recollect being involved with the consumption of an entire bottle of tequila with some friends during a swim relay race. Needless to say, I woke up in my car parked in the garage the next morning." (This woman is now a practicing attorney.) Another friend (in the health care industry, no less) remembers "sweating tequila from my pores the day after some very bad peer influence—the only thing I remember about the night before is sitting in the grass outside of a Denny's restaurant."

Unlike vodka or whiskey, tequila comes complete with a whole ritual for its consumption. According to Amis, "Pour some table salt onto the back of your left hand round about the base of your thumb. Grip a slice of lime in your right hand. Have a tot of neat tequila standing by. As fast as possible, lick the salt, suck the lime, shut your eyes and drink up."

Why subject yourself to this? Because the inebriation (as noted above) is unusual: subtle at first, then hitting you massively like a freight train moments later. Oftentimes, when you realize you should stop with the tequila shooters, it is too late. (So, no, I don't know why you would subject yourself to this.)

HAL MAYFORTH

For myself, the most lingering effect is an aversion to the smell, akin to the smell of shellac. So I try to abstain from tequila at all costs. The last two times I did a shot were at a friend's bachelor party last summer and a colleague's wedding a few years ago. On both occasions, up to that point, I was fairly sober. But as I put my lips to the shot glass and caught that unmistakable whiff, all the traumatic memories came flooding back, in a kind of bizarro reprise of Proust's madeleine.

I told Oyamel's general manager, Steve Fowler, about my predicament, prompting him to devise a plan: He started me with a couple of innocuous libations infused with tequila and mezcal (the latter having a smoky flavor and deriving from the agave plant; tequila comes strictly from the blue agave). Both were highly agreeable. Then we transitioned to an aged tequila (Siembra Azul anejo), sipping it as if it were a fine single malt Scotch. So far so good. Finally we took on the Siembra Azul blanco—clear tequila. At no time did we shoot it or use salt and lime. (In fact, printed on the side of a bottle of Del Maguey pechuga mezcal are the words "Sip it. Don't shoot it.")

Admittedly, the smell of the blanco still got to me, as if it were sending my brain signals to turn around and flee. But I was determined to follow through and developed a respect and appreciation for the drink, finding myself in control of my wits, albeit a little happier. Of course there are other brands of lesser quality that Fowler warned me against (for instance, tequilas made in Baltimore or from the country that grows the second largest crop of agave after Mexico: China). Sadly, I am sure I will meet these brands, no doubt in shots with lime and salt, at the next bachelor party.

According to Fowler, "tequila is one of the most misunderstood spirits in America." His job is to change this mistaken notion through a process of awareness and education. (It sounds like one of the toughest jobs ever.) I imagine that were he alive today, Kingsley Amis would have benefited from such "awareness." Unfortunately, the writer seems to have stuck to the bad stuff:

"Unlike other spirits, it's never advisedly drunk on its own," he warned. Amis much preferred the margarita, though even in this form he cautioned us about quantity: "After three of the same I once had the most violent quarrel I have ever had with a female, and in Mexico City too—but luckily we were both unarmed at the time."

Victorino Matus

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the weekly Standard

Barack Obama's America

It seems that if despotism came to be established in the democratic nations of our day, it would have other characteristics: it would be more extensive and milder, and it would degrade men without tormenting them. . . .

When I think of the small passions of men of our day, the softness of their mores, the extent of their enlightenment, the purity of their religion, the mildness of their morality, their laborious and steady habits, the restraint that almost all preserve in vice as in virtue, I do not fear that in their chiefs they will find tyrants, but rather schoolmasters. . . .

I want to imagine with what new features despotism could be produced in the world: I see an innumerable crowd of like and equal men who revolve on themselves without repose, procuring the small and vulgar pleasures with which they fill their souls. . . .

Above these an immense tutelary power is elevated, which alone takes charge of assuring their enjoyments and watching over their fate. It is absolute, detailed, regular, far-seeing, and mild. It would resemble paternal power if, like that, it had for its object to prepare men for manhood; but on the contrary, it seeks only to keep them fixed irrevocably in childhood; it likes citizens to enjoy themselves provided that they think only of enjoying themselves. It willingly works for their happiness; but it wants to be the unique agent and sole arbiter of that; it provides for their security, foresees and secures their needs, facilitates their pleasures, conducts their principal affairs, directs their industry, regulates their estates, divides their inheritances; can it not take away from them entirely the trouble of thinking and the pain of living?

Alexis de Tocqueville

So it is that every day it renders the employment of free will less useful and more rare; it confines the action of the will in a smaller space and little by little steals the very use of it from each citizen. . . .

Thus, after taking each individual by turns in its powerful hands and kneading him as it likes, the sovereign extends its arms over society as a whole; it covers its surface with a network of small, complicated, painstaking, uniform rules through which the most original minds and the most vigorous souls cannot clear a way to surpass the crowd; it does not break wills but it softens them, bends them, and directs them; it rarely forces one to act, but it constantly opposes itself to one's acting; it does not destroy, it prevents things from being born; it does not tyrannize, it hinders, compromises, enervates, extinguishes, dazes, and finally reduces each nation to being nothing more than a herd of timid and industrious animals of which government is the shepherd. . . .

I have always believed that this sort of regulated, mild, and peaceful servitude, whose picture I have just painted, could be combined better than one imagines with some of the external forms of freedom, and that it would not be impossible for it to be established in the very shadow of the sovereignty of the people.

—Alexis de Tocqueville

From Democracy in America, *volume two, part four, chapter six: "What Kind of Despotism Democratic Nations Have to Fear" (translated by Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop)*

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The Return of Big Government

For Obama, a spending spree and fiscal prudence are synonymous.

BY FRED BARNES

When Barack Obama met with TV anchors at a White House lunch last week, he assured them he likes being president. "And it turns out I'm very good at it," he added. Well, not exactly. What Obama is actually very good at is campaigning. He did it for two years as a presidential candidate, and it's pretty much what he's been doing in the six weeks since he was sworn in.

It's working. Despite the bad economy he inherited, the political circumstances, for Obama at least, are favorable. He's popular, as new presidents usually are. He talks about "hard choices" but hasn't made any. With large Democratic majorities in Congress, he's free of worry about rebellion on Capitol Hill. Despite glitches in picking his cabinet, his cool demeanor is unshaken. He governs campaign-style, largely with speeches and announcements. No wonder he enjoys being president. Accountability comes later.

But there's a problem. Candidates don't have to deal with reality. They talk about the wonderful things they can accomplish as if advocating them is the same as achieving them. They live in a world of political make-believe in which everything from reconciling conflicting interests to paying for costly programs is easy.

That's the world Obama continues to inhabit. Like a candidate, he's a quick-change artist, constantly switching roles. Twice last week, he insisted he doesn't favor "big government." Then he proposed a budget that would vastly expand the size and reach of the federal government, add $600 billion to the deficit, and produce a one-year shortfall of $1.2 trillion (or more). This prompted House Republican leader John Boehner to proclaim, quite accurately, that the "era of big government is back."

That wasn't all. For Obama, a spending spree and fiscal prudence are practically synonymous. He conducted a "fiscal responsibility summit" a few days after pushing a $1 trillion "stimulus" bill through Congress, not a cent of it offset by cuts in spending programs. Following the summit, Obama declared a "consensus" was emerging between Democrats and Republicans on some issues—his issues—and could be forged on others. He was dreaming.

Even the stimulus, which only three Republicans in Congress voted for, represented more agreement than not in Obama's view. "If you look at the differences, they amounted to maybe 10, maybe 15 percent of the total package," Obama said. No, the differences amounted to maybe 75 percent. Glossing over differences is a familiar tack. Candidates do it.

Next came Obama's nationally televised speech to Congress. It was a campaign speech posing as a presidential address to the nation. In fact, it sounded like a reprise of speeches Obama gave during the campaign. The purpose was not to explain or defend or justify new domestic programs but simply to proclaim them necessary. This Obama did brilliantly.

But, again more like a candidate than a president, he said things he couldn't possibly believe and indulged in rhetorical tricks. "Nobody messes with Joe," Obama said, referring to Vice President Biden, who will "lead a tough, unprecedented oversight

Fred Barnes is executive editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

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effort" to keep the stimulus on track. In truth, nobody pays any attention to Joe, as Obama surely knows.

He expressed pride in his opposition to earmarks, cleverly steering around his swallowing of 8,500 of them in a spending bill left over from last year. The stimulus was "free of earmarks," he said, "and I want to pass a budget next year" without them. The 2008 bill went unmentioned.

Obama specializes in knocking down straw men. "I reject the view that says our problems will simply take care of themselves," he said, implying that's the view of Republicans. It's the view of almost no one.

Candidates don't routinely offer budgets, at least not ones as detailed as the official White House spending plan unveiled by Obama last week. His $3.6 trillion budget, Obama said, provides "an honest accounting" and tells "the whole truth . . . about what costs are being racked up." So far, so good.

The most striking thing about Obama's budget is its new definition of "savings" and its use of dubious assumptions. In normal parlance, savings are the opposite of spending. Savings are what you get when you cut spending. Not to Obama, however. He claims $2 trillion in savings in his 10-year budget blueprint, but they mostly are tax increases or money collected from companies in Obama's cap-and-trade program to curb carbon pollution. Actual cuts are microscopic.

The president has described the economy as teetering on the edge of catastrophe, but you'd never know it from the assumptions about economic growth in the budget. It assumes the economy will grow at a 3.2 percent clip in 2010, 4 percent in 2011, and 4.6 percent in 2012—considerably higher of than the assumptions of private forecasters. And generate a surge in tax revenues. That's wildly optimistic, so don't hold your breath.

Okay, it's true that presidents often present rosy scenarios. But economic recovery programs like Obama's, with heavy spending and borrowing plus tax hikes on the investing class, have never caused such a sudden explosion of growth. Obama's budget has one attribute of a candidate's makeshift budget: Its author is winging it.

Obama wants to exploit economic fears to enact his entire, massive domestic agenda this year. That was the point of his speech to Congress and the country. He's gotten part of it—the stimulus. Relying on his skill as campaigner in chief, not commander in chief, may get him the rest.

Financial markets have already registered a vote of no confidence in Obama's economic plan. But the political community and the public are reserving judgment. At some point, reality will intrude, followed by accountability. But not yet. ♦

Indefensible

Obama's military budget presages retreat.

BY TOM DONNELLY

The era of big government is back. But conservatives ought not simply to worry about the size of government or the federal deficit—although a $1.7 trillion deficit is an eye-popper. They should worry, too, about the shape of American government. Barack Obama may be running up World War II levels of debt, but he'll be running down the U.S. military.

Of course, that's not what the headlines on administration press releases or in the actual newspapers say. Even the leading defense industry paper, *Defense News*, trumpeted "Obama Budget to Boost Spending" for 2010. But a closer reading of even the sketchy budget charts provided by the administration this week paints a very different picture.

Take first the question of the current budget, the fiscal year 2010 spending that Congress will approve this year. As during the Bush years, there are two critical accounts to track: the normal or "baseline" defense budget and the "emergency supplemental" appropriations to cover wartime costs. In order to understand what's really happening, it's crucial to try to keep these distinctions clear. To make an everyday analogy, it's the difference between the sticker price of your car—what it costs to bring it home from the dealer—and the expenses of filling it with gasoline and keeping it running.

In 2009, the Bush administration's baseline budget was $513 billion, and the plan was to spend $523 billion in 2010. The Obama administration announced this week that it would "boost" the 2010 figure to $533 billion. So the Obama budget is bigger than the Bush budget, right?

The reality, though, is something quite different. Here's where the question of wartime supplementals comes into the picture. The Bush administration's last supplemental requests were for $188 billion in 2008—at the height of the Iraq surge—and a $65 billion installment on the war costs of 2009. The Obama budget adds another $75 billion in war costs for 2009, for a yearly total of about $140 billion. What accounts for the whopping difference between the 2008 spending of $188 billion and the $140 billion to be spent in 2009? It's not, unfortunately, that the success of the Iraq surge or the drawdown now beginning in Iraq are saving much money. Indeed the immediate costs of a safe withdrawal are no different from those of staying on. And, with a second surge—

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really, a long-term ramping up—of forces in Afghanistan about to begin, the supplemental cost of those operations is going way up.

What's happening is probably that what previously has been counted as "war costs" is migrating from the supplemental appropriations to the baseline budget. This is what reformers, good-government types, and the folks in the Obama Pentagon mean when they talk about "honest budgeting."

Particularly in the 2007 and 2008 supplementals, tens of billions of dollars were spent to "reset" the Army, which has seen its equipment stocks decimated by the efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, and to buy needed gear like the heavy Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicle—the Big Wheel-like carrier that is being used in convoys and for patrols instead of the thin-skinned Humvees. The *Washington Post* reported, too, that the costs of countering improvised explosive devices, the increasingly sophisticated "IEDs" that account for a disproportionate share of American casualties, are now to be paid for out of the baseline budget. The bottom line is this: The Obama defense budget isn't "boosting" anything. As should become apparent over the next two months as the administration prepares detailed defense budget proposals, this actually is the beginning of significant cuts in defense programs. What the president really means when he talks about "hard choices" is a less capable U.S. military.

The Obama budget is an especially stark and in-your-face announcement of a new direction for the country. Indeed, budgets are the most concrete expression of a government's prejudices and ambitions.

Consider how, per the budget, Obama imagines the America of 2016. The economy has recovered in fine style. The stimulus produced a spurt of growth and the economy is expanding permanently at about 2.5 percent per year. Inflation remains low, about 2 percent, the annual federal deficit is "only" $500 billion, and total GDP is a touch more than $20 trillion. These are the assumptions enshrined in the Obama budget.

But the government itself looks more like the government of France than what American governments have looked like in the past. We'll be spending $4.5 trillion on social entitlements—Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid—debt servicing, and other mandatory programs. That's about 22 percent of GDP. Discretionary domestic programs—the prime source of congressional pork—have grown to nearly $700 billion, another 3.5 percent of GDP. Defense spending will be smaller. The baseline defense budget will be $594 billion, less than 3 percent of GDP. That's half the 50-year Cold War average.

An American retreat that leads to a longer-term American decline will make for a very different world. Obama's budget is a signal to friend and foe alike that the United States is turning inward, will be a less certain ally and a less powerful adversary. It's there in the numbers. Indeed, these numbers almost perfectly reprise the Clinton 'peace dividend' of the 1990s—minus the peace.

The United States cannot remain the sole superpower, the guarantor of the international system, if it chooses to spend just 3 cents of every dollar on defense. The Obama administration loves to talk about "soft power" and "smart power," but the fact is that "hard power" is still real power. The Obama budget is a plan for steady American decline.

It also plans on a rapid retreat from current commitments. Announcing his Iraq withdrawal plan in a speech at the Marine base at Camp Lejeune, N.C., on Friday, Obama said—"as plainly as I can"—that U.S. combat forces would be out of Iraq by August 31, 2010, and that the "residual" force of advisers and trainers would be gone by the end of 2011. The budget codifies this timetable in dollars: The projected wartime supplemental for 2010 drops to $130 billion. The largest slice of that pie will pay for the withdrawal of 12 combat brigades from Iraq, while it's likely that the costs of fighting in Afghanistan—where commanders see 2009 as a holding of the line in preparation for more effective operations in 2010—will begin to equal Iraq costs. But the big drop is planned for 2011, the year that the Iraq status-of-forces agreement takes full effect. In that year, the Obama budget has a "placeholder" for wartime costs of just $50 billion. Based on the numbers, by 2011 Obama plans to be fighting the "Long War" at less than one-third the cost of the effort of 2008. He's fulfilling his end-the-war campaign pledges, but almost certainly at the sacrifice of any lasting victory.

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How the world will respond to the combination of a deep and long-lasting economic contraction and a shrinking of American power is difficult to say. The historical precedents are not encouraging: These are the conditions that preceded World War II.

There is nothing inevitable in any of this. President Obama is presenting one path forward. Other political leaders—especially those who understand America's role in the world—can present an alternative way forward. ♦

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A Ph.D. in Every Pot

Obama's diploma mill

BY ANDREW FERGUSON

GARY LOOKE

In the long, long list of presidential directives that President Obama handed down to his countrymen in his televised Day of Reckoning speech last week, one was more far-reaching than it appeared at first glance. "Tonight," he said, "I ask every American to commit to at least one year or more of higher education or career training." He said he didn't much care what kind of higher education it was: "community college or a four-year school; vocational training or an apprenticeship." The ultimate goal is that by 2020 "America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world." Then we'll be able to compete in that globalized economy we keep hearing about, "where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge."

The goal, though comfortably far off, is impressive enough, but the point was driven home with unusual force. First, the president insisted that "dropping out of high school is no longer an option." Anyone who doesn't finish high school, he said, is "quitting on your country." (This attack on the patriotism of high-school dropouts drew whoops of approval from his audience on Capitol Hill.) So everyone has to finish high school, and everyone who finishes high school has to go on to higher education. And if they go on to higher education but don't go on to get a degree, America won't regain its world title in college graduates. They'll be letting down the team.

To prevent such an outcome, the president will provide a variety of inducements, from the tiniest Pell Grants for a two-year associate's degree to full rides at the fanciest four-year colleges. And as you might expect, the people who stand to receive the most money under the president's proposal are adamant in their belief that the country probably will not survive unless it is enacted at once. The president of the American Council on Education could barely contain herself.

"The education components of the new economic stimulus package prove that President Obama will back his words with resources and action," said Molly Corbett Broad. This is lobbyist talk for *ka-ching!* "If America is to compete economically," she went on, "we must have a competitive work force and a new generation of innovators and entrepreneurs."

The assumption here is that the way to make somebody a competitive worker is to send him to college, an idea that will astonish anyone who's ever been served in a restaurant by a waiter with a master's in art history. This is just the first of the confusions

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that dog the president's proposal, which for the moment exists only in hypothetical form. Another confusion comes from his hazy definition of what the problem is.

The 2020 goal relies on a gloomy factoid that has become a favorite of hand wringers and heavy breathers in the education-obsessed community. According to data compiled by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the United States ranks tenth among the 30 developed nations in the higher-ed "participation rate"—the number of people between the ages of 25 and 34 with postsecondary degrees.

But the poor ranking isn't nearly as portentous as it seems, as several educational researchers have pointed out, to little effect. Clifford Adelman of the Institute for Higher Education Policy noted recently in (the indispensable) *Inside Higher Ed* that the OECD rankings take no account of the country's vast demographic and ethnic stew, and ignores a 45 percent increase in foreign-born immigrants over the last 15 years that tilts toward the young and unschooled. If a country's population is growing at the younger and older ends, then its higher-ed participation rate in the middle will appear artificially low. Most of the United States's OECD competitors have flat or declining population numbers, along with greater social conformity.

When you expand the cohort to those between the ages of 25 and 65, the U.S. participation rate jumps and the United States ranks fifth among the 30 OECD countries. It turns out that lots of Americans earn their degrees after they've passed college age and even the middle years. "Lifelong learning," and the federal government's insistence on "fostering" and "nurturing" a "culture" thereof, has been a fetish and cliché of our politicians for 20 years. Weirdly enough, it seems to have worked. Lifelong learning makes more sense than cramming all your schooling through the window of the late teens and early twenties. As a vocational matter, late learners are more likely to concentrate attention on abilities that the current marketplace needs, unlike kids who have to predict what jobs this finicky global economy of ours will be rewarding 10 years from now. And the learning is more likely to stick. Adults are smarter than teenagers. In general.

Thus the OECD rankings are less gloomy than the president thinks. If there is a problem with a shortage of workers with associate's degrees or B.A. degrees, it is more concentrated than he lets on. The Gates Foundation announced last November that it's spending close to $100 million to encourage young people to get a higher-ed degree. Unlike the president, however, the foundation will spend money where the difficulty lies. While more than 60 percent of high schoolers go on to post-secondary school, the number for poor black and Hispanic high schoolers is roughly half that. These are the students that the Gates program will encourage and subsidize. More important, it will bring them into community colleges and vocational schools exclusively. At the least they will get an associate's degree and a marketable skill. Then, if they're inclined, they can go on to a four-year school.

The president's view is more romantic. With certain exceptions, he'll have taxpayers pay for anyone to go anywhere—wherever higher-ed is sold, whether it's to learn hospitality management at DeVry University or to study neocolonialism at Oberlin. Many taxpayers will find this approach indiscriminate, even incoherent. For behind the president's proposal is a contradiction set deep in the American understanding of things—deep in American democracy itself.

On one hand, the president takes the purely utilitarian view of what higher education is for: You get a degree so you can get a good job, and, as you work, you make the country more prosperous. On the other hand, by including traditional four-year liberal arts colleges and universities in his plan, he implicitly endorses the opposite view: Higher education is for spiritual advancement, the development of character, and the refinement of the mind, and it must be, moreover, accessible to everyone. It is the collision of American practicality and American romanticism. The second view considers the first crudely materialistic, the reduction of education to mere training; the first sees the second as . . . well, *nice*, I suppose, but pretty much beside the point. Haven't you heard about that global economy?

The idea that the two views can be reconciled is why the restaurants of our great country are overrun by art history majors spilling *osso bucco* on disgruntled customers; these delicate souls have been trained for everything but work. It's also why more than half of students who enroll in traditional four-year schools never finish; they didn't want be trained for everything but work. They wanted to be trained for work. It has also inspired a multi-billion dollar industry designed to help teenagers get into a four-year college whether or not they really want to go.

When he included four-year schools in his list of higher-ed options, the president was being very generous. (Why wouldn't he be? It's not his money.) But the traditional college was only one of four options. In practice the three others—postsecondary education understood as job training—will be where the action is and, if we're lucky, where the students are.

The democratic ideal of outfitting everyone with a liberal arts degree has always been vaguely unrealistic, and now the lack of realism is becoming unavoidable. Whether intentionally or not, the effect of pursuing the president's goal will be to reconfirm the utilitarian view and slowly render the traditional view irrelevant—an overpriced indulgence that the country can no longer afford. For traditional colleges, this is a Day of Reckoning the president didn't mention. ♦

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A Hero's Welcome

Britain greets a Guantánamo detainee.

BY JANET DALEY

London

Well, it wasn't quite Nelson Mandela's release from Robben Island, but the treatment was nearly as reverential. The news channels followed every detail of the progress of Binyam Mohamed, the first detainee released from Guantánamo by the Obama administration, from the moment it was solemnly announced that his plane had left the ground to return him to Britain—the country that had granted him asylum (but not citizenship) before his unfortunately timed journey to Afghanistan in June 2001—until the moment the private jet touched down at RAF Northolt in west London.

It was the works: minute-by-minute live coverage of Mohamed's deplaning, flanked by burly men who ushered him quickly to a waiting car. These proceedings were enlivened by an offstage chorus of demands from Labour MPs, human rights lawyers, and the liberal media that the government and the security services tell all they knew about Britain's alleged role in Mohamed's alleged torture at Guantánamo. A parade of activists, from the openly Trotskyite leaders of the Stop the War Coalition to the usual array of anti-American protesters and always-available legal experts, weighed in with speculation on everything from the released man's mental state after force-feeding during a hunger strike to the judicial implications of Britain's participation in torture.

Particularly notable was the psychologist who specialized in the study of torture victims. He had not met Mohamed, nor did he have any personal knowledge of the specifics of his case, but that did not prevent the BBC news presenter from engaging him in a lengthy discussion of the likely effects on Mohamed of the treatment he might or might not have endured at Guantánamo—which might or might not have involved the active assistance of the British security forces. The final exchange in this rather surreal dialogue went something like this:

Binyan Mohamed lands in the U.K.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

BBC: Isn't it possible that a victim of torture could actually be radicalized by his treatment and led into terrorism, even if he had had no inclinations of that kind in the first place?

Psychologist: Oh yes. We often find that torture victims are so alienated by their experience that they turn toward active terrorism.

This speculative analysis is, of course, plausible. It just happens that neither the psychologist nor his inquisitor had the remotest idea whether it applied in any way to Mohamed. They were simply weaving a hypothesis. But the subtext of this flight of fancy is not insignificant: If Mohamed should, in the future, be found to be involved in terrorist activity, it will be argued not that this vindicates the U.S. decision to detain and interrogate him in the first place—but that he was radicalized by his (wrongful) detention and interrogation. So even if he turns out to be a terrorist, it'll be our fault.

By the time the main evening news came on, the BBC coverage had become a bit more skeptical. Judicious doubt was inserted into the accounts given by Mohamed himself and his eager legal team about the treatment he had received and his absolute conviction that British forces had been somehow complicit in it. But after another 24 hours, there was a new hyperbole in Mohamed's descriptions of his torture as "medieval" (the rack?) and an apparent acceptance by much of the media of his confident assertion of British involvement.

No one seemed inclined to ask the obvious question: If he believed so firmly that Britain had betrayed him ("Those I hoped would rescue me were allied with my abusers"), why was he so eager to return and make his home here? One sentence from the *Guardian*'s coverage captures this paradox neatly: "Binyam was 'extraordinarily grateful to be back in Britain,' said [his lawyer] Stafford Smith, who said he had 'zero doubt' Britain was complicit in his client's ill-treatment."

How very strange: to be extraordinarily grateful to be back in a country which you believe to have helped to torture you. Now this is not inconceivable. People often have confused and contradictory emotional reactions to traumatic events. But it does seem odd that, in all the excitement of pursuing the British government over its possible engagement in torture, scarcely anyone has thought to raise this query.

Any doubts about the credibility of Mohamed's testimony were pretty well lost in the scrum of the early coverage. This story has everything: above all, anti-Americanism combined with the delights of British self-flagellation.

As one pundit put it, "Now that Binyam Mohamed has returned to the U.K. from detention at Guantánamo Bay, there must be quite a few Whitehall mandarins—not to mention some ex-ministers—who are wandering Westminster frantically trying to clean the blood from their hands." Bush and Blair meet Lady Macbeth: The image is irresistible. ♦

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Gonna Have a Tea Party

Opposition to the foreclosure bailout rises.

BY JONATHAN V. LAST

Last May, the *Wall Street Journal* ran a front-page story about AngryRenter.com, a website which served as a rallying point for disgruntled souls opposed to a prospective Bush administration foreclosure bailout. AngryRenter.com had collected 44,500 signatures for a petition, but *Journal* reporter Michael Phillips discovered—by clicking on the site's "About Us" link—that it wasn't actually a people-powered uprising. Instead, AngryRenter was the product of FreedomWorks, a group run by Dick Armey and Steve Forbes.

Phillips spent several paragraphs detailing all the deluxe homes owned by Armey, Forbes, and others associated with FreedomWorks, making the point that only wealthy, cynical Republicans would object to helping those unfortunates caught in the maw of foreclosure.

But that was a long time ago. Before Lehman Brothers. Before TARP. Before the Detroit bailout and Obama's trillion dollar stimulus package. Now the new administration has put forward its Homeowner Affordability and Stability Plan, a $275 billion scheme to save certain people from foreclosure, and a real opposition movement may be building.

With almost $2 trillion in emergency government spending doled out since October, Obama's Home Affordability measure can be considered small beer. And at the end of the day, it's as much about creating a backdoor bailout for the banks who hold the mortgages as it is about "saving" people's homes. But as a political matter, it's something else.

On the morning of February 19, CNBC reporter Rick Santelli ranted about the plan from the floor of the Chicago Board of Trade. "This is America!" Santelli cried on the air. "How many of you people want to pay for your neighbor's mortgage that has an extra bathroom and can't pay their bills?" The traders milling around started booing and then gathered closer as he continued. Before he was done, Santelli had called for a "Chicago tea party" to protest the bailout. During the next few hours, Santelli's rant led the Drudge Report, was replayed on all of the cable networks, and was seen more than a million times on YouTube.

Santelli-inspired websites quickly appeared attempting to organize tea parties. ChicagoTeaParty.com bills itself as the official home of Santelli's tea party. The site belongs to Zack Christenson, a Chicago radio producer. Christenson had bought the domain last August, thinking it might be a good name for a group. Within 12 hours of Santelli's rant, Christenson had retooled the site, and 4,000 people quickly signed up. On Facebook, dozens of Santelli groups formed, ranging from fan clubs to draft-president movements to tea party plans for Chicago, Texas, New York, and Los Angeles.

Anthony Astolfi bought the domain reTeaParty.com about 10 hours after Santelli's rant. Astolfi is a 24-year-old web designer and small-time political consultant who dabbled in the Ron Paul world last cycle. He thought the tea party idea had a chance to catch on and decided to organize them for July 4. Working with his roommate and a cousin, they finished building a website by midnight. Then they turned to promoting the project. They did Google searches for "Santelli" and left comments pointing to their new site on high-ranking result pages. They spent a couple hundred dollars on a small number of Google and YouTube ads and finally went to bed around 5 A.M. They awoke to 40,000 emails, their site having become a minor sensation. Astolfi says they now have 11,000 people a day coming to reTeaParty.com. Ten thousand people have signed up to get information on the tea parties, and 5,000 have "pledged" to attend one of so-far eight tea parties on July 4.

Two days after Santelli's tirade, John Shilling, an 18-year-old student in Hilton Head, South Carolina, launched a site called 92percentgroup.org. Its sole mission is to oppose the Homeowner Affordability and Stability Plan. "We feel like 92 percent of the country has been paying their mortgage on time, and we've been a silent majority this whole time," Shilling says. "We're hoping to get enough people together to take a stand so we can send a message through action, not a petition." What action would that be? Shilling isn't sure, though he thinks withholding taxes or mortgage payments might work. In a way, the 92 Percent Group is instructive: It's run by an 18-year-old who doesn't have a mortgage and has yet to even decide what he wants to organize (or how to do it). Yet within 72 hours of launching the site, it received 150,000 visits.

There seems to be real bitterness about the idea of forcing people to subsidize the imprudent housing choices of their neighbors. That bitterness is on display on other websites, such as StopTheHousingBailout.com, which urges readers not to get stuck "paying for other people's *greed & ignorance*" and encourages them to lobby their congressmen.

Much of the opposition to the bailout, however, comes from people who are only tangentially interested in the politics of the matter. Beginning in 2005, hundreds of websites and blogs sprouted up warning about the housing bubble. At the time, these people were often viewed as doomsayers or cranks. Thoroughly vindicated, many

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of their sites are now de facto rallying points against Obama's plan, purely on grounds of economic prudence.

The blog FlippersInTrouble, for instance, gives exhaustive data on the losses being racked up by speculators in Sacramento, which won't help build sympathy for the beneficiaries of the bailout. HousingDoom.com, a site which began by looking at economic aspects of the bubble in 2006, is now saying, "What the market needs is more foreclosures." There is no obvious political pattern to the bubble bloggers. Some are freemarketeers. Others, such as those who run HousingPanic.com, are Democrats who see the bubble as one more failure of the Bush administration. Yet nearly all of the bubble sites, left, right, and center, are now lined up against the bailout.

But will they create a movement? Last weekend readers of TheHousingBubbleBlog.com went offline and met in Las Vegas for a get-together. There were only 24 of them, but they came from as far as New York and Washington for the chance to vent about the housing market, talk about the bailout plan, and take a bus tour of foreclosed properties and derelict construction sites. Ben Jones runs the site and put together the mini-convention. A few months ago, he says, he was asked to start a PAC to help organize a movement against the bailout. He declined because he believes the administration will do whatever it pleases, regardless of public pressure. "Whether or not there will be organized opposition, I can't say," Jones sighs. "But if there is, it won't make a difference."

He's probably right. Yet at the same time, it's easy to see the groups that might make up a real grassroots movement: the Ron Paul libertarians, renters, housing bubble obsessives, disillusioned Democrats, stat-head financial types, and, of course, rich, heartless Republicans. And then there is Santelli, who, if so inclined, might put himself forward the way Howard Jarvis did with his property tax revolt in California in 1978.

The question is whether or not these people can find each other and figure out a way to push back. ♦

Praising with Faint Damns

Congressional Republicans go soft on Obama.

BY STEPHEN F. HAYES

Last week was a bad week for limited government. President Barack Obama offered a series of proposals that would increase federal spending from 22 percent of GDP to 28 percent. He proposed a health care reserve fund at a cost of $634 billion, and his advisers noted that this would be a mere "down payment" on a broader role in health care for the federal government. Oh, and the federal government took what could be a 40 percent stake in Citibank, accelerating the incremental nationalization of U.S. banking.

If all of this tells us anything, it's that Barack Obama has an abiding faith in big government. Yet he flat denied this—"I don't," he said—standing at the rostrum in the House of Representatives on Tuesday night.

Two days later, Obama released his budget. As it is drafted, the government will run annual deficits of at least $500 billion over the next decade—if we're lucky. Those estimates are based on the administration's own exceedingly optimistic projections of economic growth and rely on budget trickery that would make Enron accountants blush. Even the left seemed surprised at the big-government boldness of Obama's budget. Robert Reich, the liberal economist and secretary of labor under Bill Clinton, called it "audacious" because "it represents the biggest redistribution of income from the wealthy to the middle class and poor this nation has seen in more than 40 years."

The Republican response to all of this was tepid, even cautious. During Obama's speech to Congress, Republicans mostly applauded, sometimes politely, at other times enthusiastically. White House press secretary Robert Gibbs was surprised and gratified by the support.

"I was awfully struck . . . that in the number of ovations that people gave during the speech, the amazing number that involved both sides of the aisle standing up and applauding," said Gibbs. He noted that such sessions are usually marked by the "seesaw" effect of Republicans and Democrats standing to applaud at different times. This was different. "I think last night, it seemed that on virtually every broad measure the president outlined in his speech, there was a reaction from both sides at the same time."

Responding to Obama's budget later in the week, Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell, a reliable conservative and usually one of the most aggressive and effective opponents of big government, offered only mild criticism. In a three-paragraph statement, McConnell agreed with Obama or praised him four separate times. He expressed "serious concerns" about the budget but had no harsh words for its sponsor, the president, reserving his criticism for "Washington."

John Boehner, the House minority leader, gave a speech at the Conservative Political Action Conference on Friday. Boehner lamented this new enthusiasm for government, but other than one reference to "the Obama administration" and the coming "spending barrage," he reserved his criticism for congressional Democrats. "When you put this in the hands of Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid, it obviously became a gravy train for left-wing pork," he said of the stimulus package. Later, speak-

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ing about a measure that would prove fatal to school vouchers in Washington, D.C., Boehner said: "One day after President Obama gave a speech about hope, Nancy Pelosi passed a bill that takes away hope for thousands of American kids here in D.C. to have a chance at [a] decent education."

This has been the Republican strategy since Obama took office: Refrain from criticizing the president directly and praise his stated desire for bipartisanship; trash congressional Democrats as irresponsibly liberal and poor stewards of taxpayer dollars; offer alternative solutions to the country's problems even if the media pay them no attention.

The reasons for doing this are plain. The country was broadly enthusiastic about Obama's inauguration, and his popularity remains high. Concerns about the economy have led many voters to abandon—or at least set aside temporarily—their skepticism about big government. "There will be a time when we need to launch a full-scale assault on Obama," says Republican strategist Todd Harris. "But congressional liberals are the soft underbelly of fortress Obama and they're on the ballot sooner."

"People are rooting for the guy," says one Republican strategist who agrees with the current GOP strategy. "In that sense, attacking him means attacking voters' own hopes, dreams, and ambitions."

"We are not going to be personal," says one Republican leadership aide. "We are not going to call him a Communist. But we will be aggressively going after the policies."

It's a tough balance. Making congressional Democrats the focus of Republican attacks during the debate over the stimulus made some sense since Obama had, in effect, outsourced the writing of that legislation to Nancy Pelosi.

But avoiding criticism of Obama on the budget will be much tougher. It's his budget, after all. Challenging the policies without mentioning Obama fails to identify the policies as *his*. It renders the critiques weak and ineffective. And a growing number of conservatives on Capitol Hill are becoming impatient with the forced restraint.

"Expecting the American people to know what we're talking about by osmosis won't work," says Representative Tom Price, chairman of the Republican Study Committee, a group of House conservatives with more than 100 members. Price has been sending out a steady stream of press releases, statements, and web videos that are far more confrontational towards Obama than the Republican leadership has been. His members are eager to challenge the Obama administration and to confront the president by name.

"For us not to highlight the fallacy and the recklessness of this administration—we wouldn't be doing our job," says Price.

Representative Paul Ryan, a conservative from Wisconsin, says it's okay to criticize the president directly as long as the critiques are policy-focused. "If the White House brings us a bill to socialize medicine and pollsters tell us he's at 80 percent approval, it would [still] be a huge mistake to do anything but criticize it."

The stakes, he says, are too big to be restrained. "This is the greatest reorganization of government since the New Deal. We are fast becoming a social-welfare state like we see in Europe. For us to be worried about poll numbers and popularity ratings would be a mistake. We should not be." ♦

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Tito the (Party) Builder

The GOP goes shopping for minority voters.

BY MARY KATHARINE HAM

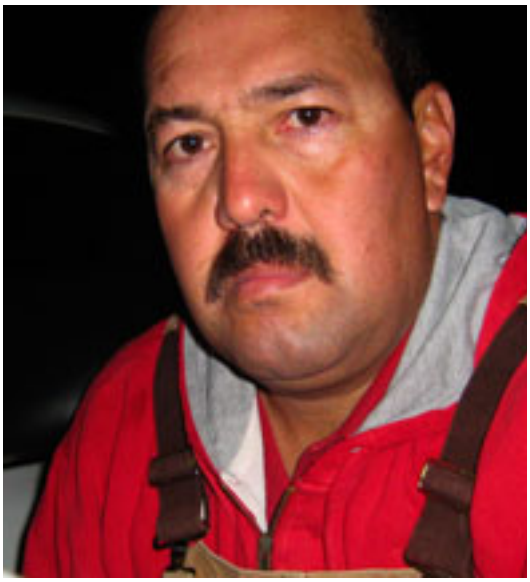
There is a political missionary in the grocery stores of Prince William County, Virginia, waiting to proselytize while shoppers are sorting through out-of-season avocados.

"Hello, I'm Tito, and I'm a Republican," he announces, noticeably without the solemn tone of an Alcoholics Anonymous introduction. But Tito's simple declaration, delivered in the Colombia native's heavily accented English, is enough to make some fellow Latinos think he might need a 12-step program.

Tito Munoz, a naturalized American citizen who owns a construction business in Northern Virginia, gained prominence in the waning days of John McCain's 2008 campaign as the second—and arguably more charismatic—coming of "Joe the Plumber."

He was overheard facing off with reporters at an October rally about their treatment of Joe Wurzelbacher. "I am Joe the Plumber!" Munoz said, crystallizing the McCain-Palin message and securing his spot in the campaign firmament as "Tito the Builder." He later appeared on Fox's *Hannity and Colmes* in his trademark shades, which he wore "to intimidate Colmes," he said.

Today, Munoz is trying his hand at another job that might require a hard hat—reaching minorities for the Republican party. That tough mission got even tougher in Prince William County, an outer suburb of Washington, D.C., when a 2007 debate over stricter immigration enforcement pushed by Republicans became a microcosm of the fiery national discussion.



Tito Munoz

DEBRA MUNOZ

A local website run by pro-enforcement activists was notorious for calling illegal immigrants "parasites" and "invaders." Its opposite number, a group called Mexicans Without Borders, pushed for "*conquista*" at rallies. The 12-hour-long public meetings/shouting matches are a memory, but divisions remain, and local Republicans, led by Munoz, are determined to make inroads during this lull in the debate.

"We have a terrible brand right now among . . . Latin American communities," says Milt Johns, a Republican member of the Prince William County school board, speaking to a group of about 40 who gathered at Munoz's house for a Saturday meeting.

Munoz, who was not involved in the Prince William debate, doesn't think pro-enforcement activists were driven by xenophobia, as opponents claimed, but the political reality is that a few activists' words damaged the perception of the entire party. "You know that the bad news [is what] travels fast," Munoz said. "Those things hit the [immigrant] community quick."

His efforts are not about solving the national immigration problem, Munoz says, which is a federal responsibility, but about repairing ties and forging new ones with communities that are quickly becoming necessary to win elections in Northern Virginia. "I'm committed to do whatever it takes to be inclusive," Munoz said, though he doesn't think that means a capitulation on immigration enforcement. He favors a "high wall with a wide gate" approach, which would allow more immigrants to come and go legally.

He has an unlikely ideological ally in Corey Stewart, the county board's staunch pro-enforcement chairman, who said in a phone interview he doesn't think Republicans have to abandon a principled pro-enforcement stance to attract Latino voters. "You don't just give in and say, 'we'll turn a blind eye to illegal immigration' just like the Democrats do," Stewart said. "You meet and sit down with them and make them realize that this is not a personal thing against Hispanics." A representative from Stewart's office attended the meeting at Munoz's house.

The crowd in Munoz's living room, munching on homemade guacamole and tacos, has its share of white male Republican archetypes, but it also boasts young immigrants like Clio Long, a native of Milan who became a citizen last May. There is Rafael Lopez, a 30-year-old running for delegate to the state assembly. Lopez's sister Lenny, a graduate student at George Mason University, and 19-year-old Joseph Taylor want to reach

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young people they feel the Republican party has written off.

Munoz warns that the work of outreach will not always be comfortable, but that people in other countries risk far more to speak their minds. As a teenager in Colombia, he worked briefly in the peasant movement of the 1970s, until members of his family were attacked and killed for their involvement. He came to America on a student visa and later got political refugee status before becoming a citizen. "Here, it's easy," he says. "You can talk about what you believe and you can participate in politics and they don't kill you. Here, it's a piece of cake."

The outreach group is still in its nascent stages, but Munoz is convinced personal contact is the way to go. He is advising the leaders of three other groups in Ohio, Texas, and Florida, all of which are holding similar meetings. He volunteers to accompany anyone who needs a translator to local church services and soccer games and takes candidates to events where they can meet minority voters. He tutors legal residents who want to become citizens.

"I'm mentoring them on what America's about," he said, with a special emphasis on Thomas Jefferson. "For me, he's the *man*."

There's evidence in the small Republican freshman class of the 111th Congress that Munoz's approach can be effective. In a year of dim Republican prospects, two newcomers took their spots in the House thanks partly to their success with minority voters—Aaron Schock of Illinois and Anh "Joseph" Cao of Louisiana.

Schock, at 27 the youngest member of the House, started his political career on his local school board before defeating a four-term Democratic incumbent for a state legislative seat in a district that is 24 percent African American. "Time and time again I visited black churches . . . and time and time again I heard, 'We've never had a Republican candidate even come here and show us the respect of asking for our vote,'" Schock said. "No party can be a ruling majority if they arbitrarily rule out certain demographics of our population."

The shift wasn't quick, but Schock's support in the black community went from 4 percent during his first run for the legislature to 39 percent in his reelection campaign two years later.

Cao, who came to America as a refugee from Vietnam at age 8, took advantage of the scandal surrounding incumbent William Jefferson, who had been indicted on multiple felony counts. Despite a Democratic registration advantage and a 62 percent black population, he upset Jefferson, 50-47, becoming the nation's first Vietnamese-American representative, and the only congressional Republican representing a predominantly black district. The key for Cao, said his campaign manager Ruth Sherlock, was a personal touch that transcended party prejudices.

"True conservatives understand that conservatism transcends all culture," says Artemio Muniz, a 27-year-old starting his own outreach group in Houston, Texas. Muniz and Sherlock say they're encouraged by the election of Michael Steele, the African-American former lieutenant governor of Maryland, as chairman of the Republican National Committee. The RNC, still in flux, has not yet proposed specific plans for outreach to minority voters, but Steele's acceptance speech hinted at his approach.

"We're going to bring this party to every corner, every boardroom, every neighborhood, every community, and we're going to say to friend and foe alike, we want you to be a part of us," Steele said in his speech.

"It's almost like [Steele's election] legitimizes our mission," Muniz says. "Now we know that the GOP is serious about outreach and about going after everybody."

Muniz's parents came from Mexico illegally but got amnesty in 1986. His father worked two jobs to get them off welfare, while Muniz turned to political philosophy to avoid the pitfalls of life in his rough neighborhood. "While everyone was joining gangs and stuff, I just read," he says, ticking off works by the Founding Fathers, Tocqueville, and Burke. "It's like a weird anomaly. I'm this guy in the 'hood and I just read books all the time."

His activism is fueled by a belief that many Hispanic voters are naturally conservative who come to America precisely because they were unsatisfied with the left-leaning governments and socialist experiments of their home countries. "These are people who have a bad taste in their mouth from failed governments," he says.

The specter of socialism is also in the air at Tito Munoz's house. "I'm not even into politics. I'd much rather just do my job or go dancing, which I love," says Long, the newly minted American citizen from Italy and a neuropsychologist. "But I really felt compelled. I lived in Europe. I've seen how Europe has been destroyed by socialism."

As if on cue, Munoz reveals to the crowd that the pink pony piñata hanging over his kitchen is not a remnant of a child's birthday party, but the finale of the evening. "It's a socialist donkey," Munoz says with a smile, pronouncing "socialist" with the same syllabic intensity Arnold Schwarzenegger gives the word "California." "I've got you in my sights now, socialist donkey!"

He brandishes a stick at the piñata for a picture before handing the work off to the kids in the room. When it bursts, a pile of Monopoly money and candy falls to the floor. "Oh no, the socialist donkey has bailed out all over the floor," Munoz shouts as the room laughs along. "It doesn't matter where the money goes. It just goes everywhere!"

Munoz, Muniz, and Long all radiate an infectious excitement that bodes well for their efforts. It remains to be seen whether, under new RNC leadership, their charm is the only currency they'll be working with.

But no matter what happens, Tito will be building in Virginia. "For those who think that Tito is gonna be quiet, they're wrong," Munoz said. "It's up to us to reach out to whoever we can grab. Whoever we can change, and grow this party, make it big." One grocery store aisle at a time. ♦

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Will Harry Reid's Dream Come True?

The majority leader's quest to kill America's nuclear waste repository continues. **BY MAX SCHULZ**

Yucca Mountain

DAN LAMONT / CORBIS

Yucca Mountain, Nevada

To stand on the windswept ridge atop Yucca Mountain is to wonder how on earth a place so remote and desolate could have inspired one of the nation's most contentious and longest-running political battles. Yucca Mountain was singled out by the federal government as the permanent repository for the nation's nuclear waste in 1987. Political squabbling and gamesmanship, however, have delayed even the first shovel from breaking ground to construct the facility. It's anyone's guess when, or if, it will ever open. The uncertain resolution of this battle means an uncertain future not just for Yucca Mountain, but for America's current nuclear power revival as well.

Not much happens at Yucca Mountain, located in the Mojave Desert about a two-hour drive from Las Vegas. More a mound than a soaring peak, it appears indistinguishable from the countless hills and buttes that can be spied for hundreds of miles. But it is this particular location's specific and peculiar degree of nothingness that places it at the forefront of the debate over nuclear power.

The 12-million-year-old mountain is among the most geologically stable locations identified by the U.S. Geological Survey. The water table sits 2,000 feet below the top of the mountain, and 1,000 feet below where the waste would be buried. The area's groundwater is part of the Death Valley hydrologic basin, separate from the Las Vegas area aquifer. The risk that well-sealed and well-secured nuclear waste could seep out to damage far-off population centers is negligible, but even that overstates the hazard. It is precisely because nothing happens at Yucca Mountain that it is an ideal locale to entomb the radioactive waste produced by the United States' 104 commercial nuclear reactors. Nevada's political class, most notably Senate majority leader Harry Reid, disagrees.

That there is any controversy over the proposed site is ironic, given the Silver State's nuclear history. Yucca Mountain sits on the western edge of the Nevada Test Site, a 1,350 square mile federal preserve that served for decades as the proving ground for America's nuclear weapons arsenal. Starting in the 1950s, the federal government detonated close to 1,000 atomic weapons on the site, or roughly half of all known nuclear explosions the planet has endured. Fully 100 of these were above-ground nuclear explosions, many far greater than the blasts that ended World War II. Yet other than craters formed by the atomic bombardment in this lunar-like landscape, southern Nevada seems none the worse off. The fallout from routinely detonating nuclear bombs 90 miles from Las Vegas had little impact on the town as it grew from a sleepy, mobbed-up gambling outpost to the spectacular Sin City of the present day.

Nevadans once embraced their state's role as the nation's nuclear handler. Clark County, for instance, at one time featured a mushroom cloud in its official seal. The old Sands Hotel on the Vegas Strip didn't just birth the Rat Pack; it also crowned a "Miss Atomic Bomb," adorning the beauty in a mushroom-cloud-themed swimsuit for publicity stills.

No longer. The default position for Nevada's elected officials today is implacable opposition to the repository. No politician embodies this resistance more than Reid, the bland trial lawyer from colorfully named Searchlight. As majority leader, with a new president in Barack Obama who also opposes opening Yucca, Reid must think his dream of driving a stake through the heart of the Yucca Mountain project finally is within reach.

So far, though, it's not looking

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good for Reid. Shortly after November's election, the majority leader brazenly vowed to sink any nominee for energy secretary who was not opposed to Yucca Mountain. Then Obama selected Steven Chu, a Nobel-winning physicist who is an enthusiastic backer of nuclear power. As director of the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, Chu lent his signature to a report advocating licensing Yucca Mountain as part of an integrated approach to managing spent nuclear fuel. Reid quietly backed down, and Chu's nomination sailed through.

Reid claims he has spoken recently with the president about Yucca Mountain, and their plan is to starve the project of funding to ensure it doesn't get built. Indeed, the proposed budget Obama unveiled last week would limit federal spending on Yucca Mountain this year to less than $300 million, which would be close to a record low for the 22-year-old project. Senator Reid says this proves the project is dead.

Not so fast. Making sure construction doesn't occur during the Obama presidency isn't the same as shuttering and dismantling the facility (though repository construction hasn't begun, Department of Energy scientists and engineers continue to study the site). It appears the Obama team is happy to deprive Yucca Mountain of money—fulfilling a campaign pledge—while leaving the problem for future presidents and senators to handle. Indeed, there are practical complications that would prevent the Obama administration from doing anything other than that. Completely shutting down Yucca would be too costly, politically as well as financially.

Under the Nuclear Waste Act, the federal government has a legal obligation to collect and dispose of the spent fuel from the nation's 104 commercial nuclear reactors. To pay for it, the government began levying a surcharge on electricity generated from nuclear power in the early 1980s. Nearly $30 billion has been collected so far, a third of which has been spent on feasibility studies that have convinced government scientists that their plans for Yucca are sound.

The process has dragged out far longer than anyone expected. The law required the Department of Energy to begin accepting utilities' nuclear waste in 1998. The Energy Department's new target date for opening Yucca is after 2020, though officials have admitted even that date is unrealistic.

Miss Atomic Bomb

While waiting for the feds to get their act together, nuclear plant operators have been storing their waste in temporary facilities. All told, there are more than 120 temporary locations holding nuclear waste in 39 states. As a stopgap measure this has helped prevent the shutdown of the nuclear industry, which provides 20 percent of America's electric power. But many of these temporary storage pools and casks are nearing capacity. Plans to license and build new nuclear plants for the first time in decades may hinge, moreover, on a resolution to the waste issue.

The failure to have the repository substantially completed amounts to a default by the federal government on its legal obligation. Several electric utilities have sued the government over failure to accept their spent fuel under the terms of the Nuclear Waste Act, and courts have found the Department of Energy in partial breach of its obligations. But monetary judgments have been suspended since DOE can plausibly claim its attempts to fulfill those obligations were slowed by congressional intransigence (notably Harry Reid's).

Last year the Energy Department finally submitted its 8,600-page license application to build the repository to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, a critical step in the long journey to opening the facility. The NRC likely will take four years studying the scientific and safety issues before rendering a verdict.

In theory, Obama could withdraw the license application, which would go a long way to killing the project. But not even the most ardent Yucca opponents think that will happen. Withdrawing the application would automatically place the federal government in full breach of its waste-retrieval obligations. Were that to happen, Washington would owe tens of billions of dollars in liabilities to commercial nuclear plant operators, yet would have us no closer to resolving the waste conundrum. That could stop the nuclear renaissance in its tracks, something for which Obama presumably does not want to be blamed.

President Obama's best bet is to ignore Harry Reid and refrain from making any significant decision about Yucca Mountain until the NRC rules on the project's scientific merits and safety concerns. Democrats have spent the last eight years charging the Bush administration with politicizing science. What would it say about Obama's inaugural address pledge to "restore science to its rightful place" if he were to disregard the scientific assessment of the NRC's technical experts in favor of the political pleadings of a lawyer from Searchlight? ♦

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President Hamlet

After a youth spent as the indulged and inevitable prince, he has become the king that Hamlet would have been had he enjoyed the services of Axelrod and Plouffe, instead of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

By Sam Schulman

To the relief of his friends and the consternation of his doubters, President Obama found his presidential voice last week in his congressional address. "It came a bit late, but Barack Obama finally gave his inaugural address," Richard Cohen rejoiced on his *Washington Post* blog. "He is president at last—and not a minute too soon."

The speech's magniloquence and grandeur only partly account for the jubilation of Obama's admirers. The balance is their expression of relief. They hope that his oratorical performance proves that Obama has recovered from the first 40 days of his administration, in which he acted not like a triumphant winner, but with a defeated joy. Five weeks of disappointments followed in grim procession. There was the great disappointment that, despite the boasts of a grand and visionary plan for economic recovery in his inaugural morning coat, he hit the ground delegating. As he said last week, "as soon as I took office, I asked this Congress to send me a recovery plan by President's Day." Rather than present a Goolsbeean masterstroke, Obama beguiled Nancy Pelosi to give us more of what had caused so much woe.

And the cabinet! Instead of the brain trust we expected, Obama ennobled a long procession of ethically tainted and self-interested men and women. But if it was not done well, it was not done quickly either. Fruits of office were offered and then withdrawn, as with General Zinni, or spit back on the presidential silver salver, as with Senator Gregg. Worst of all, the president seemed edgy, unsure of himself, every bit as irritable as his press secretary, indecisive about dog breeds, short-tempered with reporters, impatient with Joe Biden.

What about the flurry of executive orders which flew like angels and ministers of grace off the president's desk in the first days? After a few weeks, they all now have missed their target or fallen flat—and clearly there was no Plan B. Iran responded to Obama's hand of friendship by setting preconditions of its own for a meeting and running more centrifuges. Our NATO allies, asked nicely for more support in our Afghan venture, replied, nicely, that they would prefer not to. Guantánamo turns out to be completely in harmony with the letter and spirit of the Geneva Accords—and, according to the attorney general, a nice place to visit even if you wouldn't want to live there. Bush's anti-terror policies remain largely in place.

Worst of all, Obama's magnificent instrument of power, his voice and tone, seemed to have escaped his control. He frightened small children and investors with his dark prophecies of doom should the stimulus bill not be passed without delay, review, or criticism of any kind. He frightened grown men by his insouciance when he fled to Chicago for a yuppie family weekend of shopping and gossip, leaving the vital bill unsigned on his Oval Office desk.

I suspect that Obama was as disappointed in himself as we were—and even more puzzled. He expected that his bold words would produce bold action. Instead, he finds himself appointing committees of graybeards to study at leisure the very Gordian knots that his snazzy executive orders were meant to slice through. None of us—not even those who wanted him to fail—expected this kind of incompetence and inelegance, mirth in funeral and dirge in marriage.

I think we are seeing something very different, and very special, and to those who know their Shakespeare as well as they know their Obama, something poetic. Obama is not a hypocrite, a programmatic radical, or an incompetent—anyone with the patience to read his books can see that he is a 20th-century liberal of a very conventional type: incurious, superior, and vain.

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THOMAS FLUHARTY

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What is unique about him is what is unique about Hamlet. Obama avoided the path that so many ambitious men of his own generation have followed—Eliot Spitzer and Andrew Cuomo—from law school to bigger and bigger government offices. Instead, he followed Hamlet's course. He deliberately prolonged his youth, avoided responsibility and serious challenges, put his great gifts to work in the tiniest possible ways—all in order to protect his illusions from contact with very much reality. And now, in this particular job, he is up against the real world for the very first time. Obama's trajectory is Hamlet's, a youth spent as the recognized, indulged, and inevitable Prince, untrammeled by responsibility or experience. But now he is a character in a play that Shakespeare never wrote: Obama has become the king that Hamlet would have been had he enjoyed the services of Axelrod and Plouffe instead of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

I don't mean to suggest that Obama is the Hamlet of the newspaper cartoons—indecisive, melancholy, of antic disposition. He is something very different. He is Shakespeare's Hamlet as he saw himself, a man of action who knows himself through and through—but is neither. Both princes have spent their youth waiting for an opportunity that is worthy of their talent to take off their inky cloaks and reveal themselves. Obama is precisely like Hamlet in his conviction that his eloquence proves his leadership ability and his self-knowledge. And, like Hamlet's, his preparation for high office consisted of playacting, speechmaking, and self-examination.

Hamlet is obsessed with finding and playing a role—and uncertain that he is quite up to the task. Such is the Obama we have watched for the first 40 days. For Hamlet, the role he must play is rather simple: He does not expect to combine in himself the qualities of Lincoln and Roosevelt, as our unenviable president does. Hamlet only has to be an avenger. Hamlet's dream of his father assigns him this role in the first act, and, for the rest of the play, poor Hamlet repeatedly tries and fails to live up to it. Instead of taking action, Hamlet whiles away the time until his death despising, envying, and imitating the single-minded souls who can play their appointed role in life without agonizing self-consciousness. He tries to imitate them all—young Fortinbras, Laertes, his dead father. To do so, he devises over-complicated rhetorical tricks—writing speeches for the strolling company of actors, pretending to be mad, writing love letters, ordering secret renditions for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, throwing Polonius and Ophelia under the bus. Hamlet dies—and inadvertently achieves his revenge—only because he is so jealous of Laertes's fencing skill that he agrees to the fatal one-on-one that ends the play.

Hamlet's trajectory describes exactly what is unique about Obama's pathway to power—what he didn't do. Most young men of Obama's generation with presidential yearnings have tried putting their hands on the steering wheel of a smaller vehicle, like an attorney-generalship. A state AG's office is an excellent place to practice the swordsmanship that a president needs. Eliot Spitzer and Andrew Cuomo prepped this way. Rudy Giuliani matriculated as the U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York. Spitzer was the most presidential of all, because he didn't bother with actual lawyering but merely harried and bullied businessmen with something to lose—no indictment necessary.

At the same stage of his life, Obama—skill, intelligence, and training outmatching Cuomo's and Spitzer's, and with even more ambition—didn't burden himself with such responsibilities. He prepared himself purely through the exercise of rhetoric. A brief speech at a student anti-apartheid demonstration gave him a vision of power, he took an assistant professor's salary from a charity to become an organizer of community protest for such causes as asbestos removal. Most of all, he wrote autobiographies. In his books he rehearsed a vision of himself as leader, solving problems with ease that no one had ever solved before. And the key to leadership, he discovered in his very first autobiography, was not the exercise of authority but the telling of stories.

He argues that black people in America do best for themselves when they stick to the truth of things, when they share the "absence of delusions [perhaps he means illusions] that continued to operate in the daily lives of most black people" that he had met as a neighborhood organizer. So he decides that what will save his community—preserve its self-esteem and bring about a better world—is to write down his own life story. Or as he puts it more eloquently, to "struggle to align word and action, our heartfelt desires with a workable plan." "Our sense of wholeness" must find root in "Mrs. Crenshaw's story and Mr. Marshall's story, in Ruby's story and Rafiq's"—and, most of all, the prince's own. When rival princelings like Spitzer and Cuomo were accumulating executives' scalps, the future President Hamlet was rehearsing his own story in a couple of bestsellers. Within their covers he could count himself a king of infinite space.

As a storyteller and speechifier, Obama didn't need to come up with new plans—his new budget is pretty much what Stevenson, Humphrey, McGovern, Mondale, and Kerry would have shown us. Nor did he waste his time assembling allies among the movers and shakers, as Hillary did. Instead of superdelegates, Obama, like a real prince, assembled around him a court and filled

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it with courtiers—hundreds and hundreds of his closest and cleverest friends. During the campaign, Obama admitted to having over 300 unruly knights among his official foreign policy advisers. And each of these courtiers regarded himself or herself as valued for a unique insight and point of view. Among so many, is it any wonder that the courtiers include Zionists and anti-Semitic crackpots, free-traders and protectionists, education reformers and ed-school apparatchiks?

And even today, the Obama administration draws names from among the courtiers seemingly at random—Israel-lobbyist Hillary Clinton yesterday, Saudi-lobbyist Chas Freeman today. The jobs to which they are appointed are as symbolic as the members of a coronation procession. Dennis Ross, the long-promised "point man on Iran," might have been happier as a Guardian of the Royal Robe than he will be trying to live down his new job description:

> What Dennis is going to be charged with doing, is trying to integrate policy development and implementation across a number of offices and officials in the State Department. . . . He will be also trying to ensure that there's a coherence in our policies and strategies across the region. Let me be clear, he's not an envoy. He will not be negotiating. He'll be working on regional issues. He will not be—in terms of negotiating, will not be involved in the peace process. . . .

To the untutored eye, the Obama administration can seem merely lazy. Economic stimulus? Let Nancy do it. Give a heavyweight like Bob Gates a job that would affront the dignity of a Guildenstern—make him plead with the Europeans to help us in Afghanistan, but force him to admit that his boss hasn't made up his mind about whether to protect NATO members against the new Iranian/North Korean missiles. Close Guantánamo one of these days soon, decide even later what to do with its population. But it's not laziness; it's the way that a Hamlet thinks the world works. To a Hamlet, a leader like himself "who can inspire the American people to rally behind a common purpose" issues a decree. And that's all that needs to be done.

For Hamlet and Obama, leadership is something that one can imagine or speechify oneself into. Hamlet feels that the only thing that stops him from being as effective a king as Fortinbras—or the Player-king—is that he lacks their sincerity and self-delusion. Obama thinks that being FDR is a matter of making FDR-like speeches—so FDR-like that Richard Cohen had a vision of an amber cigarette-holder while Obama spoke! He needn't bother to study how FDR connived, threatened, charmed, lied, and manipulated to get his way.

In Obama's Hamlet-like world of leadership, he has no need for men like the grumpy, incorruptible Harold Ickes to serve as reality principle and enforcer. There is no brilliant, vain, and unreliable Harry Hopkins to stimulate the economy. There are certainly no fixers like Tommy the Cork or Jim Farley to make things happen in the states and cities. Instead, the administration is filled with Poloniuses. There's one sitting in the vice president's chair in the Senate. Another runs the EPA. And Rosencrantzes and Guildensterns fill the high offices at State and Treasury.

Only Shakespeare could write the mise-en-scène of my lords Summers and Geithner on their knees before the Earl of Dodd, entreating him not to ruin the king's moneylenders with a salary cap—and failing. To our new and unseasoned King Hamlet, it must have seemed like a good idea. FDR would have sent Harold Ickes and Jim Farley, and Dodd would take a long weekend at his Irish cottage, half frightened out of his wits, half convinced he was the next appointment to the Supreme Court.

Obama could fill half a dozen New Deal-era brain trusts with the courtiers still hanging around without appointments. But our President Hamlet takes the estimable people he attracts and turns them into airy nothings. He does so not out of malice or cunning, but from utter innocence of how the world works. The weakness of the Obama administration is not that it is a permanent campaign, but it is a permanent court, in particular with the fecklessness and jealousy that characterizes the court of a crown prince unsure of his power. Whatever the talent of the courtiers, what they learn to study most of all is caution. That is why there was no one among them with the courage to tell the king that if he doesn't deal with our foreign enemies now, there will be no way to cut military spending later. Fear about their futures meant that no one had the nerve to point out to Obama that raising taxes on the rich will produce not more income but less. And none was suicidal enough to remind Obama that undoing welfare reform would return the urban black population—the great beneficiary of reform—to its prior misery.

Hamlet never became a king in his own eyes, or even managed, except by accident, to avenge his father's death. A Hamlet, prince or king, can never overcome his own self-doubt, and Obama's self-doubt, unresolved by his books, may remain impervious to the fact that he has indeed made himself president. I fear our president will only fitfully be a president to himself. This fitfulness, coupled to his deeply held belief that heartfelt desire, gorgeously expressed, must inevitably lead to workable plans, will set the pattern for his administration. I expect four years of drama, muddle, and self-regard. *Hamlet* was a tragedy, but fortunately for Denmark Hamlet died in the last act. We perhaps reluctant playgoers will have the privilege of seeing its sequel. ♦

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The Ghosts of Smoot and Hawley

Opening skirmishes of a new trade war?

By Irwin M. Stelzer

The ghosts of Republicans Reed Smoot and Willis C. Hawley are haunting the corridors of power. The Utah senator and the congressman from Oregon cosponsored the bill that raised tariffs on some 20,000 imported items—increases that came to a whopping 60 percent on some 3,200 items. Despite pleas from no fewer than 1,028 economists and Henry Ford, President Hoover signed the bill into law on June 17, 1930.

It worked, sort of. Merchandise imports fell by $1.738 billion in the next year and half. Unfortunately, our trading partners retaliated, and our merchandise exports fell by even more—by $2.232 billion. Whether these declines were due to the protectionist measures that spread around the world we will never know: After all, it is unreasonable to expect the volume of global trade to increase, or even be maintained, in the face of a worldwide economic collapse, even without new artificial barriers to trade.

The rest, as they say, is history. Well, not quite. It is fashionable to blame the prolongation of the Depression on this act of protectionism. But at the time exports accounted for only 5 percent of our GDP, and policy errors, there were plenty. The Federal Reserve Board was still to tighten the money supply, and Franklin Roosevelt would raise taxes and burden the economy with a host of regulations, including some that effectively imposed cartel-style restrictions on large segments of the economy.

Still, Smoot-Hawley to this day is widely cited as one of the major errors made during the Great Depression. Which is why the fear of a round of protectionism dominated conversations at the recent meeting of the world's movers and shakers in Davos, and why the leaders of the G20 nations, due to gather in London in April, will be seeking assurances from President Obama that his protectionist rhetoric has been shed like so much of what he now dismisses as campaign talk.

What has the leaders of the world unnerved is the "Buy American" provision of the stimulus package. It seemed obvious to many congressmen, especially Democrats beholden to the trade unions, that the stimulus money should be spent in America to create jobs for Americans. Besides, Obama had promised to toughen the provisions of the dozen bilateral trade agreements the Bush administration negotiated with several nations, to redo the North American Free Trade Agreement that President Clinton negotiated with Mexico and Canada, and to crack down on American corporations that export jobs.

Torn between promises to trade unions to rein in trade and a desire not to offend foreign leaders so early in his administration, the man whom Charles Krauthammer has called "The Great Equivocator" emulated FDR's vagueness. Obama refused to urge Congress to delete the clause that has set our trading partners' teeth on edge. Buy American remains. But a man who can one day sign a bill calling for $787 billion in stimulus spending, the next day commit a possible $275 billion to mortgage relief, and then convene a national conference on fiscal responsibility—followed almost instantly by a speech to Congress calling for massive spending on health care, education, and green energy, among other things—is not to be held to any standard of consistency, even the debased one applied to ordinary politicians.

So Obama followed support for Buy American with a television broadcast during his visit to Canada, one of our NAFTA partners. Seeming to repudiate Candidate Obama, President Obama told a Canadian television audience,

> I think if you look at history, one of the most important things during a worldwide recession of the sort we're seeing now is that each country does not resort to "beggar thy neighbor" policies, protectionist policies, that can end up further contracting world trade. . . . We are going to abide by our World Trade Organization and NAFTA obligations just as we always have.

Turned free trader, Obama had inserted several

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escape clauses in the Buy American requirement. No action will be taken that conflicts with our obligations to the World Trade Organization (WTO) or with our trade agreements. Stimulus funds can be spent on foreign procurement when buying domestic products would be "inconsistent with the public interest," when homemade manufactured goods "are not produced in sufficient and reasonably available quantities and of a satisfactory quality," or when the costs of a project would be driven up by more than 25 percent. The result is a bill that allows the president to tell the unions that he is protecting American workers, while assuring world leaders that he will have no truck with protectionism.

Representative Willis C. Hawley and Senator Reed Smoot

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We will know more when the administration moves from general statements to specific actions. WTO regulations contain their own escape clauses, which is why Chen Deming, China's minister of commerce, warns that "caution must be taken even in employing trade protection measures consistent with World Trade Organization rules." The first test of both Buy American loopholes and WTO rules will come when the steel industry files antidumping and other charges against Chinese and other steelmakers. Which it will. "There is no such thing as free trade. All trade is managed," Daniel DiMicco, head of steelmaker Nucor Corp., said to the *Wall Street Journal*. He might have had in mind India's decision to boost tariffs on steel imports.

As for NAFTA, it now seems that when Obama's economic adviser, Austan Goolsbee, quietly told the Canadians last February to stay calm, campaigning has little to do with governing, he had it right. Obama still wants to incorporate "fairer" provisions in a revised NAFTA agreement, and says he hopes Canadian and American economic teams can come up with environmental and labor-standard rules that "are not disruptive to the extraordinarily important trade relationships that exist between the United States and Canada." But not just now, when the world teeters on the brink of a depression. Which is fine with his protectionist supporters, so long as in the end he delivers on his promise. If he doesn't, "there will be a whole lot of really upset people," warned Lori Wallach, director of Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch division, in the *Washington Post*.

In sum, Obama is not the out-and-out protectionist he promised to be when wooing the Democratic left, and angry factory workers in Michigan, Indiana, Pennsylvania, and other states. But neither has he been persuaded that free trade is a principle around which he can build his policy. From a free trader's perspective, things are not as bad as it seemed they might be during the primary and presidential campaigns. But not-as-bad-as-it-might-have-been is not the same as a good trade policy. John McCain tried to have Buy American deleted from the bill, and with good reason: Our trading partners are taking that restriction, no matter how many escape clauses it now contains, as an excuse to retaliate.

It is also likely that governors will try to "buy local," and it will be almost impossible to prevent them from rigging their bidding processes to maximize the number of jobs created in their states, WTO or no WTO. The early phases of the spending will likely go to repair work (paint the bridges, fill the pot holes) rather than new infrastructure projects. These will be labor- rather than materials-intensive, so Buy American will not play much of a role. Where it will matter is with so-called "green investments" at the top of the Obama-Pelosi agenda. Most solar panels and wind turbines are manufactured overseas, and domestic manufacturers have full order books. The administration will have to decide whether it wants to place orders

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with overseas suppliers, who can get the stuff to us relatively quickly, or wait the several years it would take for domestic manufacturers to expand production capacity. My guess is that the impatient greens in the administration, who anyhow do not share Congress's protectionist proclivities, will opt for speed, and push for use of the not-available-in-America provisions of the stimulus act.

We will, of course, never really know whether such protectionist measures as the Obama administration might adopt have a significant effect on world trade, which is shrinking for the first time in more than 25 years as a natural result of the recession: The International Monetary Fund estimates that the volume of global trade will decline 2.8 percent this year, after expanding 4.1 percent last year, with the world's largest exporters, China and the United States, leading the declines. We will never be able to measure whether that shrinkage was due primarily to recession or to protectionist measures.

But we can make some qualitative judgments. Think of trade in three of its aspects—the movement of people, capital, and goods.

People: The falling costs of transportation, the increased availability of information about jobs, television programs revealing the disparity in living standards, the natural desire of people to better themselves, the availability of generous benefits in some countries—all of these have contributed to a worldwide movement of people from poorer to richer countries. Here, it has taken the form of an influx of Mexican and Central American workers, some legal, others not. The collapse of the construction industry, the rise in unemployment, and perhaps a bit of better control of our southern border have made the United States a less attractive destination. Indeed, many of these workers have given up looking for jobs, and are returning home. That is true, not only here but around the world. Polish laborers, who dominated the construction trades in Britain, are heading home in droves. Only the poorest of the poor, mostly Africans, or those intent on immigrating to do harm to their destination countries, remain on the move. In short, the movement of people, one of the important components of any free-trade regime, is slowing, and not because of new protectionist restrictions.

Capital: Then there is capital—the resource once controlled by banks, now largely in the hands of governments that have been compelled to bail out these institutions. "That a retrenchment in cross-border credit is under way is beyond doubt," reports the *Economist*. Some blatant protectionism is inevitable in a situation in which governments are providing banks with the wherewithal to make loans: Politicians want that capital to be made available to their constituents, not to some foreigner who can't vote for them.

Banks everywhere are shrinking their balance sheets. And since it is far easier to assess the creditworthiness of domestic borrowers than of those in distant lands, they are naturally inclined to give preference to the hometown boys. That is prudent lending, not protectionism. Still, protectionism is on the rise. Greek banks are not permitted to send bailout funds abroad; Holland's ING has promised to lend $32 billion to Dutch businesses and consumers in return for government help; Switzerland's new restrictions on leverage (the amount of lending relative to the bank's capital) exclude lending to Swiss firms from the calculation, creating an incentive to keep capital at home; other governments are letting it be known to banks seeking a handout that they don't expect the funds to leak out to other countries.

The net result of all of this might be some fragmentation of capital markets, with funds "trapped" in some countries that could efficiently be made available to foreign businesses. But only "might." It seems more rather than less likely that businesses will find their way through this newly grown thicket, perhaps by relying more on bond markets for borrowed funds than on banks—a trend that recent figures suggest might just be under way.

Besides, at least in America, the increasing involvement of government in the banking business, and the concomitant pressure on the banks to confine lending to domestic firms, might be a passing phenomenon. The banks have every incentive to get the government off their backs as soon as they are in a financial position to do so—no more government ownership, no more drain from payments on the preferred stock held by the government, less reason to listen to Barney Frank's views on the optimal allocation of capital, or confine lending to consumers willing to buy battery-powered Schumermobiles. And fewer direct constraints on executive compensation.

Goods: So much for labor and capital. The international movement of both of these resources will decline, partly in response to natural economic forces (the recession), partly in response to (im)moral suasion by governments, partly in response to out-and-out protectionism. Turn to goods—the T-shirts and sneakers in Wal-Mart, the flat-screen TVs at Best Buy, the solar panels and wind turbines, the steel for bridges—and the problem is more complicated.

America buys more from our trading partners than they buy from us. This has been true for decades. Forget for the moment whether running such deficits is a good or a bad thing—good, because we are taking advantage of the lower cost products available from abroad, or bad, because we are recklessly spending more than we earn abroad. The political consequence, especially

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now that we are in recession and jobs are disappearing by the hundreds of thousands every month, is a call for protection from more efficient foreign competitors. But protection from foreign competition is a policy that dare not speak its name—lest the ghosts of Smoot and Hawley be trundled out in response.

So we are asked by injured parties to stop the flow of goods produced by cheap foreign labor or using exploited child labor, or goods produced in factories that do not meet our health, safety, and environmental standards, or stuff that comes to us from the bad guys (think oil), or "currency manipulators" (think China). What's more, the argument that a government that can bail out feckless, greedy bankers certainly can find it in its heart and wallet to do something for autoworkers, steelworkers, and other Americans, resonates with bailout weary voters. No protectionism, just an insistence on "fair trade." No tariffs, just more vigorously applied antidumping regulations. No import restrictions, just a wink and a nod to governors that they would do well to use their stimulus-package billions to create jobs right here at home, and subsidies for import substitutes such as ethanol. No narrow protectionism, says Britain's home secretary, merely "greater support to domestic workers." And no pressure on U.S. companies to keep jobs at home, especially "good-paying" jobs, just an end to what the president calls "tax breaks for companies shipping jobs overseas." Language can indeed corrupt thought, as George Orwell pointed out, and the use of substitutes for "We want protection from competition" corrupts discussion of trade policy.

All of these euphemisms for protectionism have been around for a while, and none is as elastic, and therefore as lethal, as the call for "fair trade," a fact of which New York senator Chuck Schumer is well aware. All he wants is a fair deal from China, which he argues is manipulating its currency so as to keep its value low, thereby making its exports cheaper here, and our exports dearer in China. His solution: a 27.5 percent tariff on Chinese goods entering the United States, a figure half way between the 15 percent and 40 percent that experts estimate to be the yuan's undervaluation.

There is no question that the Chinese authorities manage—manipulate, if you prefer—the value of their currency. Dominique Strauss-Kahn, managing director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), says that the yuan remains "significantly undervalued," and Eswar Prasad, formerly head of the IMF's China division, says it is "fundamentally misaligned," even though the yuan's value has risen in recent years by more than 20 percent against the dollar, 23 percent against the euro, and still more against the currencies of emerging nations.

Schumer is unimpressed, both with that fact and the more important consequences of a possible disruption of our economic relations with China. They send us goods, we send back bits of paper with pictures of presidents on it, they send back some of those dollars to pay for Treasury IOUs, thereby keeping interest rates here lower than they would otherwise be. The bad news is that those lower interest rates contributed to the boom in house prices and other asset values, and to profligate borrowing by businesses and consumers. The worse news is that if we choose to clamp down on that trade during a period in which recession is our biggest problem, China will cut its purchases of Treasury securities, interest rates will rise, and much of the benefit (if there is any—a point in dispute) of stimulus spending will be offset.

So far, that does not seem likely. Luo Ping, director-general of the China Banking Regulatory Commission, in a burst of candor, conceded that purchases of Treasury bonds are his country's only option. "Except for U.S. Treasuries, what can you hold? Gold? You don't hold Japanese government bonds or U.K. bonds. U.S. Treasuries are the safe haven. For everyone, including China, it is the only option."

So America is unlikely to get really nasty about China's currency policy, and China is unlikely to stop purchasing Treasuries, even if the dollar declines in value. With the U.S.-Chinese relationship stable, at least for now; Buy American watered down; natural forces causing a reduction in cross-border finance and job-seeking immigration; and the president in what appears to be a partial retreat from the protectionist rhetoric that served him so well in hard-hit manufacturing states, is free trade safe from its enemies?

No. Attacks on the free movement of capital, labor, and goods will appear in many guises. With more job cutbacks in the world's future, we can expect to see other nations imitate Nicolas Sarkozy's instructions to France's automakers—confine layoffs to overseas plants. With credit tight, we can expect to see other nations imitate Britain's Gordon Brown, and urge banks to give preference to domestic borrowers. With jobs scarce, we can expect to see more calls for restrictions on immigrant labor: Striking workers in Britain have forced contractors to limit the number of foreign workers and the prime minister to deny entry to workers from non-EU countries, and we have made it more difficult for companies that receive stimulus funds to obtain visas for skilled foreign workers. With many economies in free fall, we can expect other countries to emulate Russia, which is not a WTO member: "Putin visits a combine harvester factory and decides on the spot he'll raise tariffs. That's how it goes these days," complains one European Union trade official.

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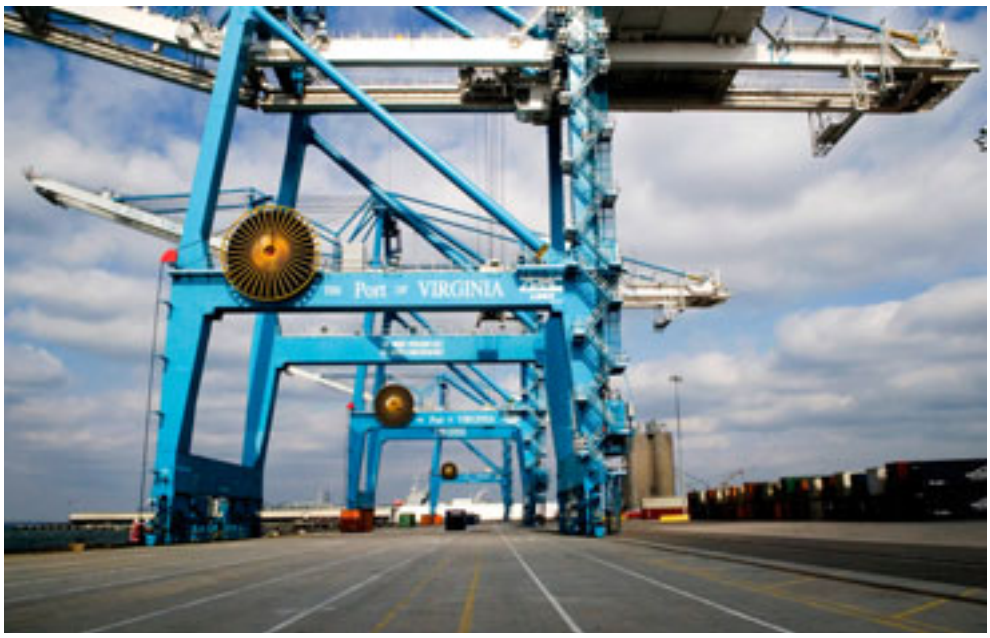
To paraphrase Churchill, from Karachi in India to Quito in Ecuador, from Moscow in Russia to Paris in France, iron barriers to trade are descending around the world.

It is unrealistic to think that any administration, especially one as beholden to the trade unions as Obama's, or any Congress, especially one as beholden to the trade unions as Pelosi's, will not leap on such actions as an excuse to retaliate. "Free traders within the Obama administration will have to spend most of their time playing defence," worries the *Financial Times*. Which might not be a bad thing. Adam Smith, no protectionist he, argued in *The Wealth of Nations*, "There may be good policy in retaliations . . . when there is a probability they will procure the repeal of the high duties or prohibitions complained of." In short, when the threat of retaliation might force a trading partner to rescind a trade barrier, retaliation is acceptable.

That leaves Obama a free hand. He knows that it would be a bad idea to trigger a wave of protectionism by insisting on rigid enforcement of Buy American, or by making excessive use of loopholes in WTO regulations. He knows that he needs the Chinese to buy the billions of IOUs that the Treasury will issue to finance his stimulus, mortgage and bank bailout bills, as well as the parts of his longer-term domestic spending agenda that he rolled into the stimulus bill. He knows that much of the spending of stimulus funds will be done by the governors, some of whom will satisfy the trade unions, allowing him to keep his fingerprints off such protectionism as creeps into procurement. He knows, too, that the unions might grumble, but they won't revolt: After all, his recent executive orders more or less require contractors to hire union workers at union wages.

Finally, Obama knows that in the longer run he can insist that our trading partners conform to his notions of labor and environmental standards, which will appease his left and cut off some of the imports from poorer countries. Protectionism in green and seemingly humanitarian disguise. Bad for America, good for Obama. Odd, isn't it: Conservatives are now fighting to preserve the free trade that a Republican president abandoned in 1930, and Democrats, while fashioning themselves the second coming of Franklin Roosevelt, are fighting for the protectionism their hero opposed in his campaign against Herbert Hoover.

The fact is that an America in recession, with Democrats in control of the White House and Congress, is likely to produce a trade policy that periodically lurches towards protectionism but then pulls back from the brink of a trade war; threatens retaliation, but leaves that weapon safely in its holster in most cases; and tries to appease everyone with a say-one-thing-but-do-another series of actions. In the case of the latter, we have an ideal representative in Barack Obama. The world economy will be well served if he uses that talent to fend off pressures from his left for another "virtual declaration of economic war on the rest of the world," as Richard Hofstadter characterized the work of Messrs. Smoot and Hawley.



Idle cranes on a slow day at the docks in Norfolk, Virginia, February 2009

NEWSCOM

But in the long run it will take more than the president's ability to appease protectionists without doing serious harm to the world's trading system. Support for free trade has dwindled not only because the recession creates a shortage of jobs. It has dwindled because free trade creates losers as well as winners—cheap garments mean unemployed seamstresses in North Carolina. The losers are innocent bystanders, the victims of collateral damage. And their plight has not been effectively alleviated by the myriad job retraining programs on offer. Until we find some way of sharing the winners' gains with the losers, support for free trade will continue to atrophy. All suggestions welcome. ♦

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Malcolm Gladwell, 2005

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Jack-Out-of-the-Box

Malcolm Gladwell, explainer extraordinaire

BY JOSEPH EPSTEIN

Malcolm Gladwell is a slender man, in his mid-forties yet still youthful-looking, sporting an afro gone haywire, as if he had just put his finger in a live electrical socket. The effect is to make him resemble nothing so much as a Jack-in-the-Box. Like a Jack-in-the-Box, he pops up here (on C-SPAN), there (on YouTube), and everywhere (giving, it is reported, talks to corporations for impressively large fees). Yet Jack-in-the-Box isn't quite right. What Gladwell, whose stock in trade is to challenge what he takes to be received opinions and conventional wisdom, prefers to present himself as is, in one of the reigning clichés of our day, an "out-of-the-box" thinker. He is, one might say, our very own Jack-out-of-the-Box.

Outliers
The Story of Success
by Malcolm Gladwell
Little, Brown, 320 pp., $27.99

A Village Explainer par excellence, Gladwell will tell you how Hush Puppies shoes came back into style, why Korean airline pilots had such a dismal flight record, what causes policemen to lose it and shoot innocent men, and ever so much more. A strong appetite must exist for such explanations as he provides, for all three of his books—*The Tipping Point* (2000), *Blink* (2005), and now *Outliers* (2008)—have been immensely successful, lounging for weeks and weeks atop the *New York Times* and other bestseller lists. Perhaps it requires another Village Explainer to account for this remarkable success.

Explanation of the kind that Malcolm Gladwell specializes in is evidently reassuring. The point of explanation is to make the world seem more intelligible. T.S. Eliot said that humankind cannot bear too much reality, but in a secular age it seems able to stand mystery even less. In his books Gladwell nicely eases the mystery out of life by informing his readers how, as he understands it, the

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world really works: And it works, if he is to be believed, quite rationally, if one will only stop and think about it. The happy news is, if you find Gladwell's various explanations persuasive, not only are the clouds of mystery gone but the sunshine of infinite promise glows in the sky high above. Everything depends, of course, on whether you find his explanations genuinely persuasive.

The Gladwellian method is by now well established, if not formulaic. He takes a received opinion—the superiority of young Chinese at mathematics, say—sets out the conventional wisdom on the subject, and then refutes this wisdom with the aid of anecdotes backed up by one or another social-scientific study. Gladwell does social science—second-hand social science, really—with a twist: The twist is that he uses it inevitably to supply happy endings. Attend to his instruction and you, too, can spot trends, think more clearly under pressure, and now, with *Outliers*, increase your chances to achieve an impressive success.

"In *Outliers*," Gladwell writes, "I want to convince you that . . . personal explanations of success don't work." People who enjoy resounding successes, he holds, "are invariably the beneficiaries of hidden advantages and extraordinary opportunities and cultural legacies that allow them to learn and work hard and make sense of the world in ways others cannot." In the understanding of what lies behind success, Gladwell's position is that nurture (the social conditions surrounding one) is much more important than nature (one's intrinsic, or God-given, talents and character).

Gladwell's methods in this book remain much as in his two earlier books. He tells anecdotes supported by social-science research, all written up in prose that Richard Posner, in a devastating review of *Blink* in the *New Republic* that demonstrates the thinness of Gladwell's use of social-science research, characterized as "for people who do not read books." Gladwell's is a prose accessible, mildly charming, with all sense of intellectual struggle or conflict neatly removed: a good read, in the cant phrase.

Gladwell often sets up his reports on psychological or social-scientific research with piquant thumbnail sketches. Tall, wearing three earrings and a metal plate in his head, availing himself of profanity of a kind that would make an Algerian camel driver blush, Zack Zipperman, Ph.D. has for the past 26 years, in his windowless laboratory at MIT, been teaching white mice to dance the cha-cha-cha, with interesting results for those who can't comprehend why men born after 1942 never carry handkerchiefs. I parody, but not that wildly.

The true target of attack in *Outliers* is the notion "that success is a function of individual merit, and that the world we all grow up in and the rules we choose to write as a society don't matter at all." (I don't, incidentally, know anyone who would say that the context of individual success, the environment in which it takes place, is negligible, but let's allow that straw man to stand.) "The closer psychologists look at the careers of the gifted, the smaller the role innate talent seems to play and the bigger the role preparation seems to play," Gladwell writes. When one was born, into which ethnic group or social class, and under what cultural conditions, in Gladwell's pages everywhere trumps any natural aptitude or extraordinary savvy a person might have. "Outliers," according to Gladwell, "are those who have been given opportunities—and who have had the strength and presence of mind to seize them."

Gladwell argues, for example, that Bill Gates wouldn't have been the success he is today if he hadn't been born wealthy and sent to a private school that could afford him unlimited time to work on a mainframe computer, where he learned and mastered his trade. Yet Steve Jobs, if I have his biography correct, came from a broken home, grew up with adoptive parents, and scored a success quite as considerable as Gates's by hanging around nearby Hewlett-Packard where he attended lectures and got a summer job and managed to learn from fellow employees.

No one would argue that when a person was born is unimportant in determining his career. But in *Outliers* Gladwell makes it seem crucial. (I should say where one was born might be even more significant: Had Steve Jobs been born in Detroit, he might today have been an automotive designer; had I, whose birth date is 1937, been born in Europe I should, like as not, have gone to the gas chambers as a child.) *Outliers* begins with a consideration of the fact that so many successful Canadian hockey players seem to have been born in January, February, or March. The reason is that, in the Canadian equivalent of Little League, the early deadline for players is January, and those born nearer to the beginning of the year have, in the early years of life, a distinct advantage of physical maturity over those born later in the year. Gladwell contends that this advantage aggregates over the years, and on a chart—he tends to be big on charts; they give that old secure social-science feel—shows that a large number of Canadian professional hockey players were also born early in the year of their respective births.

Something to it, perhaps, but not all that much. Athletic ability tends to even out over time, and in my experience, talent will show, and so will physical gifts. Michael Jordan, who came into his full height relatively late in his youth, could see the entire basketball court more clearly than any player of his or perhaps any other time; the quarterback Brett Favre has physical courage of a kind that date of birth, culture, or anything else can't explain; the pitcher Greg Maddux has the gift of athletic intelligence (he doesn't make mistakes) that has more than compensated for his less than astounding physical attributes; and for all I know all three of these magnificent athletes may have been born on the eve of Yom Kippur.

Gladwell notes that people born between 1935 and 1945—before, that is, the Baby Boom—were fortunate in belonging to the 20th century's smallest birth cohort, owing to the Depression. The advantage in this is that college admissions were easier for them, fewer people being around to apply for the many openings available. Yet for all its advantages, I would add, this generation, of which I happen to be a member, has never put a president in the White House. Go figure.

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Gladwell also remarks on the advantage of New York Jewish lawyers born around 1930 who, because anti-Semitism kept them out of white-shoe firms, turned their attention to cases entailing proxy fights with hostile takeovers and the litigation that followed from them. These cases later became among the most lucrative in legal work. Date of birth, once again, if Gladwell is to be believed, is destiny.

But long practice at one's line of work is no less important. The chief reason for the Beatles' smashing success, Gladwell holds, is that, when they first set out, they worked in the strip joints of Hamburg, where they played six- and eight-hour stretches every day, strumming and drumming their way to international success. No doubt, all this time that the Beatles had to work up their songs, to meld their various talents, was a great help. But they also happen to have had, in Paul McCartney and John Lennon, two immensely gifted songwriters along with a fortunate—and no doubt fortuitous—combination of personalities and talents who, together, comprised the astonishingly successful group. Eliminate Lennon, eliminate McCartney—poof! The Beatles are just four more working-class kids hoping to win the rock 'n' roll lottery.

With his penchant for precise formulation, Gladwell sets out the 10,000-Hour Rule required for success in any field of endeavor, be it computer programming, hockey, classical music, mathematics, what have you. His false precision aside, who would argue against the notion that practice, if it does not always make perfect, helps? But what Gladwell leaves out are the elements of passion and desire that sustain an athlete, an artist, a scientist in the loneliness of his relentless practicing.

For three decades I taught courses in prose style to students who, by taking the course, had in effect announced their interest in becoming writers. Some were immensely impressive in their talent—much more talented than I at their age. Yet many of the most talented among them washed out, drifting off, perhaps happily enough, into other kinds of work, settling for the consolations of security, marriage, family life, for all I know excessive venery. Why? Not, I think, for want of practicing—for failing to put in Malcolm Gladwell's requisite 10,000 hours—but for want of desire. They didn't want to be writers strongly enough. Whence does desire derive? I don't know, and neither, I venture to say, does Gladwell. Nor would a full battalion of scientists or social scientists in white coats armed with plush research grants be likely to find out. In the realm of desire, we are in the presence of a mystery and have no choice but to live with it.

Paul McCartney & John Lennon, ca. 1966

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Cultural background is another crucial determinant in Malcolm Gladwell's kit of handy explanations. Nobody doubts that being Jewish, French, Chinese, Mexican, Swedish, Indian, etc., brings with it its own rich mental cargo. A person's ethnicity and nationality are always worth inquiring about, and are often of the greatest interest. The tendency is to dismiss such inquiries, because their history has been fraught with prejudice, treating the inquiries themselves as potentially dangerous.

Gladwell, understanding this, suggests that we need to get over it if we are to recognize that taking cultural background into consideration can be of the utmost importance. His first example of this is the deference culture of Koreans, which he believes was for many years responsible for the poor record of Korean airline pilots. Copilots were too deferential to their superiors, the pilots, and they were also too deferential in dealing with control tower personnel, often noted for their no-nonsense aggressiveness, at such places as LaGuardia Airport, for example.

Through reprinting snippets from the recovered black-box conversation of a Colombian airlines (Colombia is another deference culture) copilot with both his pilot and the LaGuardia control tower of a plane that went down near New York, Gladwell shows that what the psychologists call "mitigated speech"—speech that is not direct and straightforward, owing to deference—had a great deal to do with causing the crash. Gladwell even goes so far as to write that, where mitigated speech prevails, "planes are safer when the less experienced pilot is flying, because it means the second pilot isn't going to be afraid to speak up."

All this is belied, of course, by the recent experience of the US Airways Flight 1549 plane captained by Chesley B. Sullenberger III, whose perfect landing, under conditions of maximum stress in the Hudson River, saved 155 passengers. Captain Sullenberger, a veteran pilot, in his first interview, claimed that he knew that nothing less than a perfect landing—wings exactly level, nose slightly up, at a descent rate that was survivable, landing at just the right speed—would do to bring the plane down without destroying it. "I was sure I could do it," he said afterwards, without the least braggadoccio. No explanation for this—in birth date, cultural conditioning, even practice—for the saving of the lives of the passengers of Flight 1549, except bloody wonderful good luck in having so fine a pilot in charge.

When it comes to the question of why Asians, and in especial Chinese, tend to excel at mathematics, Gladwell upholds the "importance of attitude in

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doing mathematics." He then sets out a claim for the Chinese cultural inheritance of patience and scrupulous attention to detail required by the cultivation of rice paddies, which involve relentless long days of work every day of the year. (American farming, by contrast, as he informs us, is merely seasonal.) Such work is part of the cultural inheritance of the Chinese, we are told, and the care and patience that go into the cultivation of rice are useful in the cultivation of mathematical skills, for patience is of the highest value in doing math.

Something to it, perhaps, but, again, not all that much, or at least not enough to persuade. In the same cultural vein, Gladwell remarks that many Jews do well in business because their parents and grandparents, as immigrants to the United States, started out in the needle trades, often working on their own at home at the end of the factory day. This, and a taste for work that they could throw themselves into, encouraged entrepreneurship in their children. Hold the cultural interpretation, hold the secondary social science. In their place, I submit a rough Jewish aphorism, which runs, "Only a schmuck works for someone else," the short interpretation of which is that, insofar as possible, it is good not to have one's fate in the hands of anyone but oneself.

In *Blink*, Gladwell wrote that "there are times when we demand an explanation when an explanation isn't really possible." But such modesty isn't really what his books are about. Nor are all his explanations disappointingly thin, half-convincing at best. In *Blink* he includes a section on how auditioning classical musicians' performances from behind a screen has, over the years, eliminated the prejudices against women in classical music, so that today most symphony orchestras, once male-dominated, are roughly half female. Jumping out of the box, as is his wont, Gladwell suggests that it might make sense to have defendants in criminal trials also behind screens, so that jurors will not convict them on their looks or manner. Like George Costanza in *Seinfeld*, Malcolm Gladwell tends to go too far.

In another instance, Gladwell compares the fortunes of a man with a very high IQ named Chris Langan, who has not had the success his raw intelligence would seem to deserve, with that of J. Robert Oppenheimer, the Berkeley physicist who headed the program to develop the atomic bomb. He concludes that Oppenheimer succeeded because he came from a wealthy and cultivated family, with all that implied in natural advantages in education and culture, where Langan came from a violent, dysfunctional one, and that, consequently, Oppenheimer was never daunted by the kind of minor setbacks that cost Langan the chance of a brilliant career. He caps this by saying that Oppenheimer had "a sense of entitlement" unavailable to poor Langan; backed up by a sociological study done by someone named Annette Lareau, he claims that "this is the advantage that Oppenheimer had and that Chris Langan lacked."

Too frequently one reads Gladwell's anecdotes, case studies, potted social-science research and thinks: interesting if true. Yet one feels naggingly doubtful about its truth quotient. So much Gladwell writes that is true seems not new, and so much he writes that is new seems untrue.

J. Robert Oppenheimer, permit me to suggest, was a man of such suavity, subtlety, and layered complexity as to be quite beyond Malcolm Gladwell's ken and comprehension. One cannot say about such a man that the secret to his complicated and, in many ways, tortured life was that his birth bestowed a sense of entitlement in him. One can say it, of course, but in so saying one is dealing in the grossest caricature—social-science cartooning, really, nothing more—and has vastly distanced oneself from reality.

Too frequently one reads Gladwell's anecdotes, case studies, potted social-science research and thinks: interesting if true. Yet one feels naggingly doubtful about its truth quotient. So much Gladwell writes that is true seems not new, and so much he writes that is new seems untrue. Preponderantly, what he reports feels more like half- and quarter-truths, because they do not pass the final truth test about human nature: They rarely, that is, honor the complexity of life.

Only in *Outliers* has a political note sounded clearly in Gladwell's writing. The problem with life, it turns out, is an environment problem. All that is required to make life better, fairer, sweeter in every way, is to change the environment. "To build a better world we need to replace the patchwork of lucky breaks and arbitrary advantages that today determine success—the fortunate birthdates and the happy accidents of history—with a society that provides opportunities for all," Gladwell writes. "The world could be so much richer than the world we have settled for."

The first step in the bestseller formula is to tell people something that they want to hear. Gladwell tells his readers that, with a few sensible alterations—a nip here, a tuck there in society's institutions, throw in a bit of persistence and lots of practice—everyone has a shot at success such as that achieved by the Beatles, Bill Gates, J. Robert Oppenheimer, you name him. In prose that never lingers over complication, he explains that life is fairly simple; no great mystery about it. Nothing cannot be explained, nothing not changed, nothing not improved. Knowledge is ever on the march. Life need no longer be unfair. Utopia is at hand, ours, with the aid of social science, to seize.

If you believe all this, do let me know, because I would like to sell you, at a very reasonable price, three only moderately marked-up books by the most popular out-of-the-box thinker of our day. ♦

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McFashion Week

A faltering economy can't stop the fabulousness.

BY SAMANTHA SAULT

New York

No, the recession didn't scare away Fashion Week, the twice-yearly circus of luxurious clothing and beautiful people. It returned to Manhattan's Bryant Park in mid-February for the fall collections. But with ever-dwindling sales, and public revulsion toward extravagance, can anything—can anyone—save the fashion industry?

On the surface, Fashion Week seemed to be much the same as it was in September when the recession was just getting underway. But the gleam of the tents in Bryant Park was dimmer, and though at least 100 designers showed their collections, some major designers (Vera Wang, Betsey Johnson) opted out of the $50,000-plus runway shows in favor of intimate presentations in their showrooms. Many showed collections at other venues outside the tents, or only online.

Even Marc Jacobs, one of the most sought-after shows of the season, slashed his guest list in half and canceled his after-party. (THE WEEKLY STANDARD wasn't invited.) And a number of seats at nearly every show—including coveted front row spots—stayed empty until the final minutes before showtime when PR reps would frantically fill them with guests from the standing section.

Are designers less willing to pay celebrities with cash or clothing to sit down in front? Are fewer publications willing to pay the costs to send reporters to the shows? Maybe the public is less interested altogether in runway fashion?

Narciso Rodgriguez dress

Reem Acra gown

CHRIS MOORE / GETTY IMAGES ; SAMANTHA SAULT

But the show did go on. Though BlackBerry didn't give away free phones, as it did last season, McDonald's provided free McCafé lattes and mochas all day, every day. (Much to everyone's relief there were no golden arches on top of the tents.) And while many designers canceled lavish dinners and after-parties, some did not. La Perla held a Valentine's Day party at the Union Square hotspot 1Oak with a Veuve open bar and tableau of models lounging in expensive lingerie. The American Express Skybox—where guests paid $150 per show or $750 per day to mingle with designers above the runways—sold out, just as it did in September. And though the swag bags were not nearly as extravagant as in years past, reporters were able to snag the occasional candle or T-shirt from an empty chair.

The clothes were more cheerful. Mixed with winter neutrals were explosions of bright colors, loud prints, and 1980s-inspired shapes. Narciso Rodriguez's delectable color palette included "citrine," "highlighter pink," and "ultra purple," and his skin-tight dresses and camo-print skinny pants pleased the packed house. Elie Tahari showed black and white tweed jackets along with floral silk dresses to champagne-swilling guests. Many collections featured rich leather or fur, impractical bandage dresses with zippers and cutouts, and colorful blazers with shoulder pads, as well as towering heels that caused models to stumble.

Designers did find ways to cut costs but still produce quality collections, hoping that people will buy better quality even if they shop less.

"I started to ask, 'How much? How much? How much?' every time I'd get a yard of fabric," designer Reem Acra told me at her showroom presentation on Fifth Avenue. "All the ready-to-wear I made with one piece of fabric—no lining, construction very minimal—so that I cut down on the prices. But there was *not one ounce* of any compromise, *not one ounce*."

Acra is known for her opulent red-carpet frocks; she designed Jill Biden's red inaugural gown. Her fall couture silk gowns in shades of purple, blue, and

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gold, along with ready-to-wear dresses and a new jewelry line, did not disappoint the fashionistas: "This is the most beautiful collection ever," said a woman identified as a "friend of Reem's" to no one in particular. (Acra did admit that she didn't pay attention to price when designing her couture gowns.)

Of course, one question, above all, hovered over the tents: Who will buy expensive clothes now? The industry is excited about first lady, and *Vogue* cover girl, Michelle Obama, and her sartorial choices—and everybody is hopeful that she will inspire women to shop.

"I think she's dressing fabulous. She's supporting some different, young designers, which is so wonderful," said the 21-year-old *Project Runway* winner Christian Siriano. Designers are hoping for a fairytale story like Jason Wu, 26, who became an overnight fashion celebrity when Michelle Obama wore his ivory inaugural gown. Even *Vogue* editor Anna Wintour was reportedly delighted with his runway show.

The industry was hoping for an Obama appearance at Fashion Week, and the press had been wondering for weeks if she would attend. She didn't—but Chicago boutique owner and *de facto* Obama stylist Ikram Goldman did, along with the White House social secretary, Desiree Rogers, who sat in the front row next to Anna Wintour at Thakoon, one of Michelle Obama's favorite designers.

Ikram Goldman attended the Zero + Maria Cornejo show, among others, and high-profile editors and fashionista guests in black arrived at the Robert Miller Gallery in Chelsea to cram into a small, stark space that smelled like fresh paint. Cornejo, who custom-designed a purple jacket that Obama wore on the inaugural train tour, described her collection as based on the "juxtaposition . . . of hard and soft, feminine and masculine." It featured black jumpsuits and dresses, dramatic draping and hoods, and a touch of vibrant blue. The critics loved it, and press rep Gabrielle Sirkin later explained that, although the company had sent out the same number of invitations as last season, the show "definitely got a bigger attendance than usual."

Comparable crowds gathered near the ropes outside the main tent an hour early for Narciso Rodriguez's 9 P.M. show. "I am *not* missing this show!" one young man with a camera told his companions—although PR reps were still scrambling at the last minute to fill a few seats. The designs were far more flattering than the black-and-red Rodriguez dress that Michelle Obama wore on Election Night; the finale dresses elicited *oohs* and *aahs* and earned much post-show praise. But I'd be surprised if the first lady wears the flashy colored silk dresses with black beading and lace details.

After the show a designer, like every designer, can only hope for favorable reviews before buyers visit the showrooms to order items from the runways. As this show ended, the elated crowd—including rapper Kanye West and French *Vogue* editor Carine Roitfeld—filed out of the tents into the cold Manhattan streets, where Sale! signs adorn the racks and windows of New York's retailers, begging shoppers to buy.

"Everything is changing," said Reem Acra. "Everything, including fashion." ♦

The Morris Dance

After 29 years, the 'enfant terrible' is an institution.

BY NATALIE BOSTICK

You will never meet a complacent modern dance choreographer. Descended from the art's socially conscious founders, theirs is a righteous movement. Its cost is, oftentimes, obscurity. One choreographer I know was asked by her mentor if she was prepared to make work for "eight people in a Soho loft." The modern, or downtown, scene can easily become an endless peer review process. I'm willing to bet those proverbial eight people are now choreographers themselves. Hidden in this advice is the idea that, if you're popular, you must be doing something wrong. Like all art, it's a calling, not a business model.

This can become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The worst modern dance concert I ever saw took place a number of years ago at a certain studio on Bethune Street in New York. Two women dressed in Saran Wrap and accompanied by earsplitting electronic music flung themselves around a six-foot-long fluorescent light aimed directly at the audience. Migraine-inducing is the only way to describe it. I learned that the show's stage manager had tried to dissuade the strident young dancemaker, but she would not be deterred from her course of self-expression. Perhaps migraines were the message. Those in the audience who didn't walk out immediately were rewarded with the knowledge that plastic wrap doesn't cling consistently to the human form. It was a memorable evening, but hardly an artistic success.

The spectacular career of Mark Morris turns on his 1984 show at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Prior to that he was just another talented Young Turk ("a would-be enfant terrible," as one writer put it) making dances downtown. This was a strange time in dance history, between the twilight of Judson Church and the emergence of AIDS. New York and dance needed something new. Morris gave it *Gloria* in 1981, and it was hungry for more.

Morris had come to New York in 1976. He grew up in the suburbs of Seattle, the only son in a close family of five. He learned to play piano and to read music and spent hours making songs, dances, and films with his family and neighborhood friends. At the age of

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eight he decided he wanted to become a flamenco dancer. He began training locally, and later included ballet and other techniques. In his teens he fell in with a communal folk dance group called the Koleda Folk Ensemble.

In the concert dance world, this is a most unusual pedigree and, perhaps, explains why ballet dancers consider his choreography easy, and some dance fans view him skeptically. What often goes unremarked is that Morris has been working as a dancer, dance teacher, and choreographer since he was 15 years old. By the time he came to New York to dance professionally, he brought a finely developed artistic sensibility and a thorough knowledge of music and rhythm. You may not like it, but Mark Morris knows his stuff.

The people I know who saw Morris and his fledgling Mark Morris Dance Group could sense his potential; "edgy" and "entertaining" were the words they used. But it was the BAM show, in its skill and broad range, that confirmed to a wider audience that he was to be the new "it" choreographer.

His star rose quickly. There was more touring, national press, and a Guggenheim fellowship in 1986. Recommended by Peter Sellars to Gerard Mortier, in 1988 he replaced Maurice Béjart as director of dance at the Théatre de la Monnaie in Brussels. It's good for us that Morris was never liked in Brussels: The Monnaie Dance Group/Mark Morris, as it had become known, did not extend his three-year contract. But the years there were fruitful and saw the creation of *L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso ed Il Moderato*, *Dido and Aeneas*, and *The Hard Nut* among others. He teamed up with Mikhail Baryshnikov to start a little venture called the White Oak Dance Project. And he learned to control his outrageous mouth.

At his first press conference in Brussels, Morris was asked to define his philosophy of dance. Perplexed, he replied, "I make it up, and you watch it. End of philosophy." This was one of his least explicit statements during the Brussels years, but surely the most revolutionary. Years from now we might point to this as the moment when modern dance stopped masquerading as religion, and grew up; but it is also fair to say that many audiences and critics still want an underlying philosophy from choreographers. Good that Morris has thick skin; the criticism of his work often feels personal.

His latest large-scale project, *Romeo and Juliet, on Motifs of Shakespeare (R&J)*, has been almost universally panned. I saw the production at the MMDG's West Coast home, Zellerbach Hall at the University of California at Berkeley. This is the Christian Science, happy-ending Romeo, based on the recently recovered Prokofiev score. For those accustomed to Shakespeare and the iconic Kenneth MacMillan ballet, *R&J* can be a shock: all those consciously clumsy modern dancers, running through low arabesques and pas de Basques, the lovers' starry apotheosis.

'Romeo and Juliet' in London, 2008

Yet even if you hate the movement or the gimmick, there are moments when the score and the staging come together beautifully, such as the scenes in the friar's cell, Romeo's introduction to Juliet, and Juliet's dance with Lord Capulet. Principal dancers Rita Donahue, Maile Okamura, Noah Vinson, and David Leventhal have transformed themselves from great dancers into great actors. None compares with Amber Darragh, whose performance as Mercutio justifies the entire enterprise.

Nothing is what you think it should be in a Morris show. Women are played by men, love turns to rutting, and politics is replaced with poetry. Indeed, Morris can frustrate with his insistence on having things both ways: funny and sad, classical and modern, vulgar and divine. If you still believe in the separation of modern and ballet, uptown and downtown, the Mark Morris Dance Group is not for you. But that gray area he has created is a rich space. *R&J* harks back to a time before ballet dancers become so technically accomplished, and proves there can be more pleasure in witnessing effort than exactness.

Morris must be doing something right. The scale of his dance projects is unprecedented; he has become the go-to guy for big ticket productions, including music festivals and operas. He receives commissions from major ballet companies, including San Francisco Ballet and American Ballet Theatre. The MMDG owns its new building in Brooklyn. Hundreds of people reserve spots in its annual audition. Former dancers staff the best dance conservatories in the nation. *L'Allegro* is the only dance I know that has its own coffee table book.

The Mark Morris Dance Group is touring throughout 2009. *R&J* (2008) will be performed in Norfolk, Virginia, Urbana, Illinois, and New York City. Audiences in Boston will see *Bedtime* (1992), a dance that contains Morris's treatment of the Schubert lieder, including *Der Erlkönig*. Washington and Seattle will get *Mozart Dances* (2006) in its entirety; Princeton, only its stronger second half, *Double*. Morris and Mozart, whose intricacies call for pointe shoes, are not the best combination, but at *Double*'s heart is the most beautiful circle dance I have ever seen. Princeton, Louisville, and Boston will get *V* (2001), another example of architectural genius, set to Schumann. *L'Allegro* (1988) returns to Zellerbach Hall in May. Two new works will premiere at Tanglewood.

The Mark Morris Dance Group has made a lot of work in the past 29 years. And Morris has proven that audiences, if you give them a chance, really like dance. You have to love him for that. ♦

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No Laughing Matter

The less you know the funnier he is.

BY ZACH MUNSON

Our societal obsession with celebrity life is now reaching epidemic proportions, and Artie Lange's well-titled *Too Fat to Fish* plays to that obsession, raising the age-old question: What is wrong with show people, comedians in particular? This book specifically leaves one asking: Who cares?

Too Fat keeps fairly well to the formulaic script of the comedian autobiography: heartfelt childhood memories of quirky family members; tales of women and partying on the road to fame and fortune; a self-flagellating attempt to atone for sins that led to a fall from grace. But the combination of terrible writing and an obnoxious subject makes this an unpleasant and unenlightening read.

Too Fat to Fish
by Artie Lange
Spiegel & Grau,
320 pp., $24.95

Lange starts out innocently enough, describing his childhood in New Jersey. As a baby, Lange was used as a prop by a mob lawyer at his father's trial for harboring the mob's counterfeit money. As a toddler he was used by his father as bait to meet Frankie Valli. In celebration after the Yankees won the World Series, the elder Lange tossed 10-year-old Artie over the wall behind home plate and into the pandemonium on the field at Yankee Stadium.

Reading that anecdotal inventory, you might think that *Too Fat to Fish* is interesting and amusing. It isn't. The stories are told in an awkward, talky fashion. They're peppered with unnecessary profanity and odd non sequiturs. Lange rambles through each chapter, clumsily laying out his life's story. He uses the quasi-conversational tone of a stand-up comedian, filling page after page with sentence fragments, odd syntax, unnecessary detail, stray thoughts, and some just plain weird writing.

For instance, reflecting on his desire to be a comedian, he declares, "Historically, a successful life in comedy is a dream that's as pondered and unpursued as a career as an astronaut." He drops f-bombs galore. He makes a number of pedestrian observations about life and its lessons. His meditation on childhood, for example, goes quickly from banal to profane, and back again, in four sentences:

> I think most people's happiest times occur when they're children. Whether you're rich or poor, we're all kids for a while; it's an experience we all share. From six to 15, nothing means s—t no matter how you grow up; we are basically carefree. That is why the most despicable crime in the world is for an adult to abuse a child mentally or physically.

In the World Series story, we are treated to this stellar commentary:

> Rich people know how to relax. That's all they do growing up, relax. I wish my mother knew how to relax because now I have the money to let her take it easy. I wish she liked tennis or golf. Maybe skiing or world travel. Unfortunately she doesn't. My mother likes cleaning tables with Pledge. If I'm ever blessed with a child, I'm going to encourage that child to take it slow. I'd like to see someone in my family f—ing relax! Even if it's 30 years from now.

Too Fat to Fish reads as if Lange, high on Johnnie Red and whimsy, dictated it one night and sent it directly to press unedited. This leaves a reader to wonder what role Anthony Bozza, Lange's credited ghostwriter, played in the process. Then there is the matter of Lange himself. After a few years of doing stand-up in New York, he was plucked from obscurity and cast on Fox's *MADtv*. He did one season before being sent to rehab. When he tried to come back for a second season, he fell off the wagon and was fired almost immediately.

Like so many comedians, Lange has lived hard, and he relates a number of stories chronicling his excesses. He destroys an expensive prosthetic mask on the set of *MADtv* to get cocaine up his nose. To ensure that no one near him finds out about his addiction, he drives three hours to Delaware a few times a week to buy heroin. A prostitute he meets in a bar saves him from a violent, angry drug dealer. One night, having run out of cocaine, he attempts suicide but is saved by a friend from the *MADtv* cast.

Artie Lange

CHIP EAST / REUTERS

And on and on it goes. Lange reflects on the numerous managers who no longer work with him (some

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of whom he assaulted with produce in a grocery store at the tail end of one bender). He wonders why he hasn't spoken to *MADtv* castmate Orlando Jones in 12 years, and then describes how he terrorized the entire cast for a year and a half. He makes the obligatory trips to rehab, and prattles on about addiction and depression in Oprah-like language like this:

> My depression felt like a wet blanket over me, keeping me from getting out of bed. . . . Looking back a year later, I could see that I was definitely clinically depressed—I'd just self-medicated with mountains of coke.

And yet, somehow, Lange soldiers on, landing gig after gig: a role in a Norm MacDonald movie, *Dirty Work*; a development deal from 20th Century Fox, a permanent home on Howard Stern's radio show.

The truth is, Lange *is* funny. Just watch him in *Dirty Work*, or on *MADtv*, or as a guest on any talk show. And he has amassed a following on Howard Stern. But he is also a that guy—"Oh, *that* guy"—so do we need to know about his first experience with a hooker? Or the time he defecated in his motel bed? Is all this really necessary?

Lange professes great admiration for another troubled comic, admitting, "I can only dream of being as funny as Chris f—ing Farley." Farley had a small role in *Dirty Work*, and Lange calls Farley's death a "wake-up call," saying: "I couldn't believe it. I'd just done a movie with him, and he was so vibrant and alive. And drugs took all that away from him. I got the message all right."

Since Lange developed a heroin addiction soon after Farley's death, it is unclear exactly what message he, in fact, received. And as interesting as it might sometimes be to ponder why so many entertainers live (and sometimes die) in this squalid and demented way, a book like this raises another question entirely: Is there any reason we should be privy to their excesses and failures, their most intimate and disturbing peccadilloes, simply because they make us laugh?♦

Cash for Balkans

A sound currency is the least of Bosnia's problems.

BY STEPHEN SCHWARTZ

Thirteen years after the Dayton peace accords that ended the combat in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and almost a decade since the end of the NATO intervention in Kosovo, these two Balkan examples of American-supported "nation-building" seem about to reappear on the political horizon. And Clinton-era figures now prominent in the Obama administration—Joseph Biden, Hillary Clinton, Richard Holbrooke—are all apt to preen about their exploits in Southeast European conflicts. So with the reappearance of Americans associated with the Balkan torment as policy wizards, it makes sense to examine what has transpired in Bosnia and Kosovo since the onset of Western involvement.

One Currency for Bosnia
Creating the Central Bank of Bosnia and Herzegovina
by Warren Coats
Jameson, 349 pp., $42.50

Warren Coats, who had 26 years' service as an economist for the International Monetary Fund, has published this densely detailed but instructive account of how, with his participation from 1996 to 1999, divided Bosnia was provided with a modern financial system by the international community that had assumed responsibility for that badly wounded country's future.

Textbooks and similar authoritative chronicles of the practical transformation of onetime Communist economies, deformed or disfigured by years of ideological interference, are rare. Coats brought to his work in Bosnia a background that included experience in Bulgaria and Moldova—two deeply corrupt states that, although they did not suffer the bloodshed seen in Bosnia, were (and remain) economically and socially handicapped—as well as in the Palestinian territories. He later worked in Kosovo, Serbia, and Turkey.

He patiently recounts the travails required for the confection of a hard currency, the Bosnian convertible mark or KM. It replaced the Deutsche Mark, which was used as Bosnian money immediately after Dayton, and at the end of 2001 gave way in Germany to the euro. This is an irreplaceable contribution to the study of post-Communist finance.

Coats and an army of international advisers and mentors, including personnel from the Agency for International Development, had to contend with many obstacles in the creation of a Bosnian currency, a policy objective mandated by the Dayton agreement. Serbs, now as then, occupy more than half of Bosnian territory as a statelet that was the model for Moscow's puppet regimes in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Croat representatives had their own claims on turf and practice. Bosnian Muslim representatives, like their ethnic peers, were encumbered by a socialist centralized "payment bureau" system that substituted for normal banking.

As Coats describes it, the domestic payment law in the Muslim-Croat federation making up the rest of Bosnia "was confusing, internally inconsistent, and at variance with actual practice." The payment bureau acted as an intermediary between financial clients and the banks. The international advisers did not consider the pay-

Stephen Schwartz is the author, most recently, of The Other Islam: Sufism and the Road to Global Harmony.

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ment bureau to be a holder of deposit liabilities, but the functionaries of the Federation Payment Bureau viewed their outfit as a central bank.

Transferring the daily cash operations required by Bosnian businesses from the payment bureau to a brand-new Central Bank of Bosnia-Herzegovina—intended to function at an international standard and succeeding the former National Bank of Bosnia-Herzegovina—had to be accomplished without the new institution enjoying credit resources to cover overdrafts.

Such issues are as daunting for the lay reader as they were (in Coats's narrative) for him and his colleagues. Coats acknowledges the useful counsel of Steve Hanke, the libertarian economist, who noted that a "currency board" crafted for Bosnia by the international community, which should have kept a strong hand on financial operations, included too many loopholes that prevented it from promoting monetary stability. Nevertheless, overcoming limitless barriers, Coats and his team succeeded in establishing the KM as a solid currency, with "culturally neutral" paper money designed to be acceptable among Serbs, Croats, and Bosnian Muslims. Coats describes the introduction of the KM as "an enormous success," but Bosnia's financial restructuring failed to solve serious problems of lawlessness.

He describes as "depressing" the spectacle of Bosnian political obstruction of privatization of state banks and other financial reforms. In addition, because of persistent ethnic rivalries and the hoarding of KM coins, the definitive acceptance of the KM as Bosnia's money was held up for years.

Unfortunately, such minor issues as the scarcity of paper and small metal change don't figure in a study written from the viewpoint of an "international," as foreign administrators are known in the Balkans. But this is predictable: Coats shuttled in and out of Sarajevo without having to deal with the frustrations of daily economic life in a deeply traumatized, ex-Communist country. Until recently, the worst thing anybody living in Bosnia could do was to offer a bill over 10 KM as payment for any item: *Ne imam sitni* (I don't have change) was the infuriating response of Bosnian service and clerical employees to any such tender. Under the payment bureau system, merchants were required to settle their accounts daily, and this was a pretext for starting business each morning without the small "bank" used to make change in any normal store. Some Bosnian retail clerks were so primitive in their outlook that they would not accept bills that had slight tears in them!

Bosnia was lucky that dedicated professionals like Coats came and fought their way through thickets of intrigue and obstinacy to create a central bank. Nobody sane, in a country undergoing nation-building, would reject such a glittering asset, and Coats rightly expresses satisfaction that Bosnia was the first ex-Yugoslav republic to replace the old central payment bureau system—although it embarked on the path to modern banking later than others. But now that the "Bosnia crowd" are restored to power in Washington, should we ask how such efforts have improved the lives of Bosnians?

As a consequence of the neglect of Bosnia's social rehabilitation, the country has become a field for the expansion of radical Islam. When Dayton was signed—imposing what increasingly looks like a permanent partition—"Afghan Arabs" who had gone to the country to pursue extremist jihad were only a minor element: Some 6,000 of them, at most, joined the Bosnian struggle, but comprised no more than a rivulet in the wide stream of armed Bosnian resistance. These *mujahedeen* won no battles and otherwise never influenced the outcome of the fighting, and their Saudi-sponsored Muslim missionary work was met with hostility by indigenous Muslims dedicated to moderate Sunnism.

Today, however, after so many years of endemic unemployment, and with the growth of a Muslim mafia, Bosnian Muslims find their capacity to resist extremist blandishments seriously weakened. The country's top Islamic cleric, Mustafa Ceric, has revealed an almost limitless capacity for self-aggrandizement. Parading in white robes with gold brocade trim, Ceric travels around Europe and visits the United States (where he formerly acted as an imam in Chicago) projecting himself as a candidate for an Islamic papacy, and delivering speeches, empty of serious content, on interfaith cooperation.

As 2008 wound down, Ceric generated a new, bitter controversy with a plan to erect a massive residence for himself on a hill overlooking Sarajevo. The Bosnian poet Semezdin Mehmedinovic accused Ceric of paying for his new palace with money from Bosnian Muslim and ethnic Albanian gangsters. Ceric's building project has also elicited protests by students at the Sarajevo Faculty of Islamic Studies (who lack a dormitory) and condemnation from less prominent, but more respected, clerics. The latter include Mustafa Spahic, preacher at the Cobanija mosque, and his colleague as a professor of Islamic studies, Rešid Hafizovic, one of the world's outstanding scholars of Sufism.

Asked about the spread of Wahhabism in the country, Hafizovic has warned pointedly against "the uncontrolled operation of an unacceptably large number of *madrassas* and Islamic universities . . . [a] threat and betrayal of quality in the educational institutions of the Islamic community." Notwithstanding an excess of Islamic schools, Hafizovic continues, "we see the paradox that Bosnian Muslims, instead of being freer in spiritual terms, more creative, self-confident, and intellectual, today find themselves in a condition of utter spiritual enslavement, crippled, and intellectually castrated."

Coats's account of Bosnian economic reform shows the bright side of nation-building. But those who have seen the realities of Bosnia in the streets of Sarajevo must conclude that something more than foreign generosity and expertise is required to rescue countries from dictatorship and war. ♦

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Cheap Date

When times get tough, it's time to go to the movies.

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

The moviegoing story of 2009 so far is just how much more of it there has been than in recent years. Over the Presidents' Day weekend, the box office tally was nearly one-third higher than it had been in 2008, and that tracks with the year as a whole against previous years.

This is a cultural signpost of some significance. The movie audience, like the audiences for all the older and more conventional forms of popular entertainment, has been in slow but steady decline for a decade now. (Of course, it's been in decline pretty much since 1946, when 90 million people went to the movies *every week*, but that's a different story.)

People always answer the question about the disappearing movie audience with the same stock reply they give to everything: The computer did it. Or rather, the computer chip, the near-magical object that gives laptops and Nintendo Wiis alike their unprecedented oomph. This is far too simple an explanation. The fact is that there was an explosion of leisure-time activity in the United States over the past decade. Restaurants opened by the tens of thousands. Amusement parks were spiffed up and refurbished. People went on vacation more frequently, and for longer periods of time.

Though a common complaint about the movies, especially from parents of young children, is that the cost of ticket and popcorn and babysitter would run to $50 for a night out at the multiplex, that amount of money stopped seeming outrageous at some point during the take-out-a-second-mortgage-on-your-house-to-pay-for-a-week-at-Disney World craze. In the competition for leisure time and dollars, movies might actually have come to seem like a cheap date, nothing special, and possibly a letdown when there were so many other things you could be doing with your time.

It is surely no coincidence, comrade, that the huge uptick in moviegoing matches up almost precisely with the national realization that the economy is in disastrous shape and that there is a potential threat to the future prosperity of many, if not most, American families. No one is going on vacation. The restaurants that opened by the thousands are closing by the thousands.

Ginger Rogers

JOHN SPRINGER COLLECTION / CORBIS

What's left? Movie theaters. It's around 20 bucks for two people, eat dinner before you go, and you know what? You can sneak your own popcorn inside in a tote bag; the babysitter's rates are probably lower than they were, too. In a great deflation, people are going for a deflated pleasure.

Meanwhile, another important factor in American moviegoing is about to change: The number of movies made is on the verge of collapse. By one estimate I've seen, three times as many movies were made in the English language in 2007 as in 1987. In New York City, 573 films were released in 2008. The result: Every Friday in the middle years of this decade as many as 10 new films would open. And if they failed to make a sufficient amount of money in the first 10 hours of their release, they were effectively removed from distribution in a matter of days and consigned to oblivion so that the next 10 films could open the following Friday.

That's over. Hollywood is going to undergo a radical simplification during the next few years, and so will the independent film market. The number of films released will decline by at least a third, and probably more, this year, and will be down by 50 percent in 2010.

The economic logic is inescapable. Hollywood no longer has hedge-fund capital to burn. The kinds of tricky European tax shelters that allowed studios to make movies for almost nothing (detailed brilliantly in Edward Jay Epstein's *The Big Picture*) are going to be closed. Even Steven Spielberg was forced to go shopping for new backers in India, and when those backers went broke, he came back to the United States and found that his old friends at Universal had lost their stomach for doing business with him.

Moviegoers are already indicating they want to be given a chance to see movies over a period of weeks; that is what the enduring sales figures for *Gran Torino*, *Paul Blart: Mall Cop*, and *Taken* indicate. None of these movies is a barn-burner, but they offer a moviegoer a decent couple of hours of entertainment, and don't give him a hard time.

Here's another signpost to watch for: If the kids from *High School Musical* start singing "We're in the Money" in pig Latin, the way Ginger Rogers did in *Gold Diggers of 1933*, then we'll know we're really in the soup. ♦

John Podhoretz, editor of Commentary, *is* The Weekly Standard*'s movie critic.*

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Oliver's Story

The startling saga of Cromwell's cranium.

BY PHILIP TERZIAN

In the Grand Guignol of English history, few episodes are as impressively ghoulish—and, in their way, instructive—as the posthumous fate of Oliver Cromwell. Not the fate of the Lord Protector's historic reputation, which is formidable and largely secure, but the disposition of his corpse and, in particular, his head—warts and all.

Cromwell's Head
by Jonathan Fitzgibbons
National Archives, 240 pp., $22.95

The title of *Cromwell's Head*, which might strike the common reader as unappetizingly specialized, is in fact somewhat misleading. To be sure, a fair portion of this modest volume is devoted to the Cromwellian cranium. But it is also a brief, compelling, and fair-minded account of the life and career of Oliver Cromwell, the country gentleman and back-bench parliamentarian who rose to power as a citizen-soldier in the Civil War, dethroned the Stuart monarch Charles I, and presided over England's experiment in a Puritan republic in the middle 17th century. Few are agnostic on the subject of Cromwell, especially in Ireland; but Jonathan Fitzgibbons, a doctoral candidate at Oxford, treats Cromwell as the complicated—cruel, large-hearted, merciless, generous—man that he was, and successfully translates his time to ours.

No easy task, especially when considering what happened to Cromwell after he died in 1658. The English Civil War had been a struggle for power between royalists and parliamentarians, but the judicial killing of Charles I left a vacuum in the polity. Cromwell did not wish to replace one dynasty with another, but he did step in as "Lord Protector"—somewhere between head of government and absolute monarch—and when he died, another vacuum was created. Cromwell's son Richard was briefly appointed to succeed him; but "poor Tumbledown Dick," an otherwise capable man not cut out for authoritarian rule, couldn't navigate the rapids between the New Model Army and parliament, and General Monck, commanding general in Scotland, summoned the exiled Charles II from France.

Restored to the throne that the Puritans had confiscated when they beheaded his father, Charles sought a measure of vengeance, executing several surviving regicides and, in the case of the Lord Protector, some posthumous justice. In 1661 Cromwell's corpse (along with two other regicides, Henry Ireton and John Bradshaw) was disinterred from its vault in Westminster Abbey, ritually hanged at Tyburn, and thrown in a pit. His head, which had been cut off from his body, was dipped in tar, impaled on a pike, and hung over Westminster Hall, where it remained for the next 20 years.

No one is quite certain when and how the head disappeared—there is a tradition that it was blown down during a gale and retrieved by a sentry—but as early as 1710 it had turned up in London on exhibit in a museum of curiosities, and passed from dubious owner to dubious owner until the early 19th century, when it landed in a family of rural gentry, which withdrew the object from public display. Its last private proprietor, Canon Horace Wilkinson, allowed a forensic medical examination in the 1930s which confirmed that, for various circumstantial reasons, it was the genuine head of Oliver Cromwell.

In 1960 this macabre remnant of the age of Roundheads and Cavaliers was buried in the chapel of Sydney Sussex College, Cambridge (Cromwell's alma mater), where a plaque informs visitors about its residence "near to this place." The exact location is alleged to be a secret, known only to the master of the college and a handful of others, for fear of theft (by Cromwell's detractors) or adulation (by Cromwell's admirers). In any case, there it rests, after a highly improbable journey, probably indefinitely.

The reader—well, this reader, anyway—has one practical and one rhetorical question. The practical question is to wonder why, in the age of DNA analysis, it hasn't occurred to the master and fellows of Sydney Sussex to pluck a hair from the scalp, or perhaps a flake of epidermis, to determine whether their chapel really does harbor the head of the Lord Protector, or not. There were all sorts of rival claimants in the 19th century, and there are troublesome gaps in chronology. The head is in a better state of preservation than one might expect—at least according to the entertaining photographs in the text—and the ever-growing throng of Cromwell descendants could quickly, and easily, settle the matter.

The other point is, perhaps, a little unfair—but that is, to be astonished by it all. The saga of Oliver Cromwell's head is an amusing, if ancillary and largely capricious, footnote to Cromwell's life and works; and it could be argued that the stages of its disembodied career—from artifact and oddity to prized possession and sacred relic—reflect the times. But that Cromwell's disinterment, postmortem execution, and the public display of his severed head occurred as recently as the late 17th century is a commentary, of sorts, on civilization. Yes, it was a long time ago; but Harvard College had been founded a generation earlier, John Locke was writing his theories of liberal politics, and the Glorious Revolution of 1688 was around the corner. ♦

Philip Terzian is the literary editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

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"Last fall, Annie Leibovitz, the photographer, borrowed $5 million from a company called Art Capital Group. In December, she borrowed $10.5 million more from the same firm. As collateral, among other items, she used town houses she owns in Greenwich Village, a country house, and something else: the rights to all of her photographs."

—New York Times, *February 23, 2009*

NESS

Stocks

March 3, 2009

Photo Fund to Keep Wolves at Bay

Modeled on TARP, New Equity Pool to Protect Art Assets

By John Beresford Tipton III
Washington Post Staff Writer

NEW YORK—In a program modeled after the federal government's Troubled Assets Relief Program (TARP), which purchases assets and equity from troubled institutions in order to strengthen the financial sector, Art Capitalist, a New York investment group, has established Consolidated Relief for Assets in Photography (CRAP), a capital fund to protect the archives, penthouses, and rural estates of America's preeminent paparazzi, shutterbugs, boudoir photographers, and staffers for Maxim, GQ, Vanity Fair, and the E! cable network.

"What kind of country would this be," says Bernard H. (Barney) Amdoff, chairman and CEO of Art Capitalist and trustee of the CRAP fund, "if somebody like Annie Leibovitz—the woman who gave us unforgettable images of a pregnant Demi Moore and a decomposing Susan Sontag, not to mention Miley Cyrus and Michelle Obama—had to sublet her place in the Hamptons, or spend the night at a Holiday Inn Express? What would that say about our commitment to the arts?"

'Unforgettable' art imperiled

Ron Galella, the legendary Manhattan photographer whose zealous devotion to his art prompted the late Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis to seek a restraining order against him, has borrowed an estimated $2 million in CRAP funds to ensure the safety of his thousands of negatives and correspondence with lawyers and the New York courts. And according to a former employee of Art Capitalist, millions of CRAP dollars have already been invested to protect the duplexes and waterfront properties of artists like Ms. Leibovitz who have immortalized Britney Spears, Alex Rodriguez, Lindsay Lohan, Sean (Diddy) Combs, and the late Anna Nicole Smith.

"We're not just talking about mere property," says Mr. Amdoff. "This is our national

See CRAP ARTISTS, *A5, Col.1*

Post Secures Funding for Tomorrow's Issue

By Donald Graham
Post Staff

with profits from a bake sale held in front of the Democratic

that "if any Mexican billionaire is reading this, please call

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